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## THE SAFE BREAKERS' GANG



BY  
POLICE CAPT. CLINCH

"ROBBED, BY HICKORY!" SHOUTED TAD. "AND YOU KNOW WHO DID IT!" HE ADDED, TURNING FIERCELY UPON THE "TAIL-ENDER" OF THE "THREE H.'S."



# A SAFE BREAKERS' GANG; OR, THE THREE H.'S GREAT SKILL.

By CAPT. CLINCH.

CHAPTER I.

JULES JEPWORTH.

"Hey, there!—what're ye doin'?"

The speaker was Tad Silsby, telegraph operator and man of general usefulness around the rural railway station of Tin Bridge.

He had just come in from attending a switch, the local freight for Jersey City having just pulled out.

There was not a soul to be seen in or about the station building when he went out ten minutes before, and Tad Silsby had done what he knew he had no business to do—in other words, he went out and left the ticket-window open.

The door he had closed, and, as it had a spring-lock, he did not feel that he had taken a very great risk in merely leaving the ticket-window ajar.

Yet there was a man in the office, sitting in Tad Silsby's chair, and fumbling with the telegraph key.

In response to Tad's demand, which we have quoted, the intruder turned slowly about, stared at the youth in a brazen fashion, and proceeded, without speaking, to light a cigar.

In the meantime Tad had unlocked the door, and strode into the office with a determined air, as though he were mentally and morally prepared to eject the cool stranger with such a degree of force as might teach him better manners for the future.

"Say, mister, what was you doin' with that telegraph key?" Tad demanded, as he confronted the silent intruder.

"I was sending a message, my young bantam," the other replied, as he sent a cloud of cigar smoke toward the ceiling.

"Sendin' a message, was ye!" echoed the young operator, whose astonishment at the other's "cheek" was too great for expression.

"Yes, my bantam, I was sending a message. You see, I know how to finger the key pretty well, and I had a message that I wanted to send. You wasn't here—I was—the instrument was handy—click—click—away she went. What's to pay?"

The stranger, whose eyes were the sharpest Tad Silsby had ever seen, smiled in a nonchalant way, and pulled out a roll of money.

"What's to pay, young man?" he repeated, as the other continued to stare, more speechless than ever at the sight of so much money.

The money in the hand of the stranger was in bank and government notes, and Tad's eyes, which were as big as saucers, saw that the bills were of large denomination.

The man must have held several thousand dollars in his fingers at that moment. And he handled it as if it were but so much waste paper.

"Come, boy, what's to pay?" the other demanded once more.

"I—I don't know—as there's anything," faltered Tad.

"I wasn't asking about the fee of the Western Union Telegraph Company, you understand," the man went on, in his careless manner. "My message contained less than ten words, so a quarter will pay for that. But I want to know what you want?"

"I don't know as ye owe me anything. I didn't do nothing. And what's more, you had no business to touch the telegraph, anyway, and I ain't going to take the reg'lar fee. I'm goin' to report what yer done. That's what I'm goin' to do."

The stranger still fingered the money in one hand. At the same time he took the cigar from his lips.

Tad Silsby saw a steel-like glint in the man's eyes as he fixed them on the youth's countenance.

"So you're going to report me for meddling with the key and doing a little of your work for you?" he exclaimed, a sound in his voice that matched the metallic hardness of his gaze.

"Ye no business to tech it. You knowed yer hadn't. Ye crawled in here through the ticket-winder, and ye no right to do that. I reckon yer are a thief!"

Tad had seen twenty years of life, and he was full of that indomitable quality which is vulgarly called "sand."

His legs were short, as were his arms also, which may have been the reason for the stranger calling him "bantam."

His build was of the "stocky" description, and he could lift a heavier weight than any man in Tin Bridge.

This was not all. Tad Silsby had, in the winter prior to the events which we are chronicling, taken lessons in wrestling and boxing, and his reputation in these sciences extended beyond the precincts of Tin Bridge.

Even the master who had taught him admitted that the youth was one too many for him.

Hence the assurance with which Tad now undertook to defend his rights as custodian of the little railway station and telegraph office.

The stranger had never heard of the prowess of Tad Silsby, else, perhaps, he would have been more wary.

He returned the cigar to his lips, and smoked on for a minute in his unconcerned manner. He still held the money in his left hand.

"As I was about to say," he resumed, after a pause, "I wasn't going to offer to pay for the use of the Western Union wire. The company has had dealings with me before, and knows it is no use to kick. But I thought likely you would like a little fee yourself. Just a trifle—ten dollars or so. What do you say?"

"What are ye to pay me for?"

"For being a prudent, circumspect young bantam, as you look capable of being."

"Ye think if ye pay me ten dollars that I won't report ye?"

"That's it."

"Ye miss yer calkelations, then."

"Want fifteen, eh?"

"I'd get bounced if I covered it up. That ain't all. It ain't my style to let a thief come in when I'm out and run my office for me. I don't want none of yer money, and yer better get out 'fore I tackle yer."

The stranger coolly pocketed the money, continuing to pull at his cigar, and not withdrawing his gaze from the face of the youth.

He glanced at his watch; then pushed one of the two chairs which the stuffy little office contained toward Tad.

"Sit down!" he said



The man's tone had undergone a wonderful change.

Before it had been persuasive; now it was peremptory.

Tad felt a strange thrill pass through him. It was as though he had been subjected to a mild electric shock.

If any citizen of Tin Bridge had addressed him in such a tone as that he would have "pitched into" him forthwith.

But, somehow, he did not feel so much like attacking this man as he did a moment before.

"I—want you to git out of here!" Tad faintly ordered.

"I tell you to sit down!" repeated the other.

Tad hesitated; then obeyed.

"Dang him!—I b'lieve he's mesmerized me!" the youth uttered, half aloud.

"There will be a through freight along in about ten minutes," the stranger said, speaking in a cold, steel-like voice that seemed to send a chill up and down the spine of Tad Silsby.

"Yes, I b'lieve so," was the low response.

"It doesn't stop here, unless it receives special orders?"

"No, that one don't."

"Well, the message I sent just before you came in was an order for that train to stop."

"An order for No. 96 to stop at Tin Bridge?"

"Exactly."

"And what did you sign to the order?"

"I signed 'N. B.' which is the call of this station, I believe."

"Land alive! What did ye do that for?"

"Because I wanted to get aboard the train."

"The freight won't take a passenger for love or money!"

"It will take me without either love or money, my bantam!"

"What do ye mean?"

"Just the words I've spoken, and no others. I'm given to putting things straight when I put them at all. And now for the last word, for there isn't any time to lose."

The speaker produced a twenty-dollar bill, and flitted it before the eyes of the youth.

"You see that, my bantam?" he demanded, a fierce gleam settling into his eyes.

"Yes—yes, I see it!"

"And *this* my bantam?"

This time the silver mounting of a forty-four caliber revolver glistened within a few inches of Tad Silsby's face.

"Land alive!" gasped Tad.

"You see it?"

"Yes, I can't help seein' of it!"

"Choose which you will have—a bullet from my right hand, or the rag in my left. Wait—hear my proposition; you are to say to the trainmen of that freight, and to whomsoever else that inquiries, that you telegraphed the order to halt here! You will tell them that you found an obstacle on the track, and hadn't time to get it clear alone! You will find the obstruction in the shape of a rock that will be all you will care to move. My telegram, you see, saves the train. You went out and left your office open. You neglected your duty, which will have to be known, if you give me away. There is a great deal to favor your swearing to the truth of what I say. Refuse, and I shoot! Promise, and the money is yours, just as a keepsake to remember Jules Jepworth by! Come!—say the word."

Jules Jepworth! Where had Tad Silsby heard that

name before? He suddenly remembered, and beads of perspiration started from every pore.

"Land alive!—I'll promise!" he huskily cried.

"And you will keep the pledge?"

"Till I die!"

"Good! Now, go and be removing the rock from the track and forget that you have seen me here. Quick, on your life! And—but hark!—I hear the rumble of the train! Go—go!"

Tad Silsby rose, and staggered forth from the dingy room without a word.

In two minutes the heavy train rumbled in.

## CHAPTER II.

### A BROKEN SAFE.

As Tad Silsby went out from the station at the bidding of the stranger, a crooked, dwarfish figure squirmed out from beyond an angle of the building, and followed him with the noiselessness of a shadow toward the point on the track where Jules Jepworth had told him to look for the obstruction.

This peculiar man, for a man it was, kept on until he was sure of the precise destination of the youth. Then he paused and waited to see the latter lift the obstruction from the track.

Tad tugged at the stone with all his great strength. It must have weighed fully three hundred pounds, and as it was difficult to get a good hold upon, it seemed to Tad that it must have required the combined efforts of two men to get it to its present position.

The train was at that moment approaching. Tad found that it would take several moments to remove the stone, so he seized his lantern, and swung it as a signal to stop.

As the telegram sent by Jules Jepworth was sufficient to stop the freight at that station it was already moving at a slow pace. In another moment the breaks brought the train up with a groan and a jolt.

Instantly Tad found himself surrounded by trainmen.

"What's the meaning of this?" demanded the freight conductor gruffly.

"Big stun on the track, and I couldn't git it off afore ye got along," Tad replied.

"Stone on the track! How does that happen?"

"Dunno. S'pose somebody put it there. Weighs pretty nigh half a ton I should think. Got it pretty nigh off, but didn't dare to wait any longer, so telegraphed for ye to stop."

"Somebody meant to smash my train, did they?"

"Looks that way."

There was an immediate and excited discussion among the men, and two or three were ready to help Tad remove the rock.

The track was soon clear, but the conductor was not satisfied. There had been a manifest attempt to wreck his train, and he could not proceed with any sense of confidence, for to him it seemed more than likely that the attempt would be repeated.

"There's got to be notice of this business sent back to the division superintendent," he grimly declared. "And then we'll see if we can't get at something. This is the second time within a week that obstructions have been found on the track of this road."

Tad's eyes protruded with surprise. As may be im-



aged, knowing as he did who put this rock on the track, he was in an extremely uneasy frame of mind.

A dozen times he was on the point of telling of his adventure with Jules Jepworth.

Where, he asked himself, was this invincible stranger now?

Since going out in obedience to his command to remove the rock, he had seen no sign of the stranger.

It had been the purpose of the latter, as he well knew, to get aboard the freight.

Had he done so? And was he at this moment concealed on board the train?

Tad's brain was in a whirl. And, while he transmitted the telegram as dictated by the conductor to the superintendent, he added, under the impulse of the moment, the words:

"Look out for a stowaway on board No. 96!"

The reply, "O. K.," was all that came back. And Tad rose from the instrument with a loudly beating heart.

"I've given 'em a hint about that bloke, anyhow," he thought. "And now if they don't spot him it ain't my fault. But if that Jules Jepworth should find out that I done it, after his ugly threats—jee!—but I dunno but he'd kill me"

Tad went out, and saw the freight move slowly away.

Once more he was alone, and a sense of vague fear stole upon his usually indomitable spirit.

And when, a moment later, as he was on the point of re-entering the station, a dwarfish figure rose, as it seemed to him, from the very ground at his feet, his heart leaped into his throat.

The first glance at the strange figure told him that it was not the one who at that moment he most feared to meet—Jules Jepworth.

Yet he was but slightly reassured as he looked into the grotesque face of the dwarf and saw that it was one whom he had never met before.

His first and most natural inference was that it was an accomplice of the bold man who had compelled the freight to stop at Tin Bridge.

"Who in the old cat—" the youth began. But the other interrupted in a harsh, rasping voice:

"I've nothing to do with cats, old or young, Tad Silsby. So give me your undivided attention for a moment."

Tad leaned against the station building, his big hands involuntarily clenched.

"If he wants a row with me," was his inward comment, "I'll give him all he wants of it! I never was afraid of a shorty yet!"

"I want you to tell me what you know about the man that caused that train to stop at this station," said the stranger.

"How do I know who did it?" the youth returned.

"Because you saw him, and he told you that he put the rock on the track, and then telegraphed himself to stop the train."

Tad realized that the other in some way knew the truth, or at least enough of it to render any attempt at deception futile.

"I never saw him before to-night," he admitted, with an apprehensive backward glance. For it seemed to him every moment that the piercing eyes of Jules Jepworth were upon him.

"You never saw him until to-night, eh?" the dwarf persisted.

"Never that I knows on."

"He told you his name?"

"He said it was Jules Jepworth."

"And that he wished to get aboard that train?"

"So he said."

"Do you know why?"

"I hain't the least idea. But I reckon such as him are likely to be crooks."

"You have hit it," grinned the dwarf. And a new sensation of fear thrilled the youth.

But he straightened his sturdy figure, and braced up his courage by recalling that he had never been thrown in a wrestle nor "knocked out" in a square stand-up fight in all his life.

"And I might hit it again by guessing that you was a pal of his'n," he boldly uttered.

"You're great at guessing," grinned the dwarf, with a writhe. "You could guess a whole book, if you didn't know how to read, it is likely. But with all your guessing, you never dreamed that Jules Jepworth did anything more here than to put the rock on the track, and then to send a message to have the train ordered to stop at this station."

"What do ye mean?"

"Go in and look at the safe in the office. Maybe that will tell you."

Beads of perspiration suddenly started forth on the forehead of the youth.

"Land alive!" he cried.

At a bound he gained the interior of the little office, and glanced toward the big safe in the corner.

He noticed that a barrel stood in front of the lock.

He rolled it away; and at the same moment he was conscious of the presence of the dwarf at his side.

A glance told him the story.

A hole had been drilled in the door of the safe, and the door itself stood slightly ajar.

He had left it secure—even he was not capable of the negligence of leaving it open.

He flung it open now; the ponderous door swung back against the wall with a thud.

The small money-drawers in the safe had been taken out, and replaced upside down in the bottom of the open space underneath.

"Robbed, by hickory!" shouted Tad.

"Just so!" smiled the dwarf.

Tad turned upon him fiercely.

"And you know who did it!" he cried.

"I know who did it."

"And I'll warrant that you know where the money is—that you've got a part of it, or expect to have."

"I know pretty nigh where the money is, young man, but mighty little of it do I expect to get as my share."

"Then you was pals, and he played ye false—lit out with all the boodle?"

"You are making some more pretty guesses, but this time they don't hit any closer than they ought to. Just clear your noddle of one error, and then you'll be in shape to see the truth when it appears to you. The one that robbed this safe of the money deposited here this morning to pay off the hands on the new section of the road that's building is no pal of mine. I'm short and scraggy, I own, and my eyes ain't mates, and my ears and nose were picked out of a job-lot—but my pals aren't in this sort of business at all."

Something in the one twinkling eye that rested upon the countenance of the youth told him that the other was



something more than he seemed. There was a magnetic quality in both the voice and eye, yet it was not like the baleful power exercised over him by Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker.

"Who—who are ye, anyway?" Tad asked, with sudden eagerness.

"I'm the tail-ender of the three H's!" said the dwarf.

"I've heerd of 'em! The three H's—Hunt, Hall & Hyde!" exclaimed Tad.

The dwarf writhed and grinned in acknowledgment of the fame of the great trio of man-hunters.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A BOLD RUSE.

The robbing of the safe in the office of the little railway station at Tin Bridge was, in truth, only a bit of by-play on the part of Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker.

It might be said that he did it merely to keep his hand in while he was waiting for the train on which he wished to escape to another locality.

Jules Jepworth was one of the most remarkable men in the country.

He knew what it was to mingle as an acknowledged equal with the finest ladies and gentlemen in social gatherings in several of the leading cities of the land.

He had held positions of trust in banking houses and with great mercantile establishments.

He had been the superintendent of an important division on a great railway, besides having held various subordinate positions.

Therefore there was no class of business with the details of which he was not more or less familiar.

Last, but by no means least, he had worked in a great safe-making shop, and was himself the inventor of a safe-lock which was considered one of the best made.

When he began life he had intended to follow an honest trade or profession. But an adverse circumstance aroused in him a spirit of bitter revolt against the world.

He resolved, then, to henceforth live at war with those with whom he could not win success in peace.

This, in brief, was the foundation of the career of Jules Jepworth; the most expert manipulator of locks, and chief of the boldest safe-breakers' gang in the country.

At the moment when Kirk Hyde, the "tail-ender"—as he called himself—of the famous "three H's" emerged from the angle of the station building to follow Tad Silsby, Jepworth hurriedly snatched a valise from underneath the bench where the telegraph instrument was situated, and then glided to a window at the rear of the small waiting-room.

The window was open a crevice; Jepworth flung the sash as high as it would go and leaped forth.

Like a shadow he darted across the narrow open space beyond, and by a short detour reached the train which had just come in.

He approached it from the side farthest from the station, and at a point about midway between the forward and rear ends.

He climbed the brakeman's ladder between two cars, secured the valise, which was quite heavy, to one of the rungs near the top, and then settled himself to calmly await developments.

The night was cloudy, and there was no moon. Everything seemed to favor his purpose.

Once, just before the train started, he heard footsteps approach his hiding-place.

He shut his teeth with deadly resolve.

"A brakeman, most likely," he thought. "But if he tries to pick me off from here it will be the dearest attempt he ever made. What is a brakeman, more or less, anyway? He takes his life in his hands when he undertakes such a hazardous career, and he might as well come to his end by meeting me as to have his head knocked off one of these days by passing under a low bridge that he doesn't look out for!"

He saw a shadowy figure below—a dwarfish figure, so it seemed to him. But it did not climb up. In another moment it stole away as silently as it came.

"Who was that, anyway?" said Jules Jepworth, under his breath. And for the first time a sense of vague uneasiness crept upon him.

Had he known that the dwarfish figure was that of Kirk Hyde, of the famous "three H's," his alarm would have assumed a more definite form.

But this was something which he was not to discover until later, and in a different manner.

Presently, to his intense relief, he felt the jolt and heard the clanking of straightening links of the train, showing that it was once more in motion.

Slowly the train rolled on its way, leaving the red and green switch-lights of Tin Bridge out of sight.

Jules Jepworth did not expect long to remain in his present position undiscovered.

The train kept on for two hours, making only a single stop during the period.

At last it began once more to slow up.

A brakeman came running along the tops of the cars, setting up the brakes as he went.

There was no brake between the cars where Jepworth was concealed; but as the train came to a pause he saw the brakeman stop above him and peer down, as it seemed, directly into his face.

Without hesitation the safe-breaker climbed to the top, and stood face to face with the brakeman.

The latter raised his lantern, and held it so as to obtain a good view of the other's face.

"Another stowaway, eh?" exclaimed the man, with an exultant grin.

"Yes, my friend. But I'm not the kind that can't pay their fare. Name your price, and here is your money."

The brakeman stared at the roll of bills which the stowaway held in his hand.

"If you had money to pay, why did you steal a ride?"

"Because I chose to, my friend."

"You're an independent one, I'll say that for you!"

"Name your price, and take your money."

"I don't get my money that way. There's been too much of this business lately, and the company has turned off two or three men for not making an example of the beats. I don't propose to be fired for any such reason. Come along, and we'll see Joe Spring."

Jules Jepworth smiled, but did not stir.

"Who is Joe Spring?" he asked.

"Conductor."

"And if we go and see him what will he do?"

"You'll find out soon enough. Come along, or I'll make ye!"

The brakeman was plucky. There was that in the eyes of the stowaway which would have deterred many from attempting alone to enforce a rule of the road.



But this man seized Jepworth by the arm, and shoved him toward the end of the car.

But a most unexpected thing happened.

The lantern was kicked from the brakeman's hand, and it fell in fragments to the ground.

The two men clinched. For an instant they swayed to and fro; then they fell upon the flat top of the car, and rolled over and over in rapid evolutions.

But the struggle ceased as suddenly as it began.

Jules Jepworth sprang to his feet, and spurned the motionless form of his foe with his foot.

"He will be more cautious next time," he said, through his shut teeth.

In another moment the safe-breaker was upon terra-firma, and walking away from the spot with a resolute swing, as though he were ready to defy all the officials of the great railway to their teeth, if occasion should require.

The hour was past midnight, and he found himself in the main street of a large, straggling town.

He passed a policeman who eyed him askance. Jepworth gave the officer one of his keen, penetrating glances, and hurried on.

The policeman started to follow, impelled to do so, perhaps, by the fierce glint which he caught from the stranger's eyes.

Jepworth kept on until he reached the entrance to a national bank, which was situated in the middle of the principal business structure in the town.

Here he paused and waited for the policeman to come up.

The officer hurried out of his measured pace, as he beheld the mysterious and suspicious behavior of the keen-eyed stranger.

"Just a word with you, Wilson," said Jepworth, in a low tone, touching the astonished officer on the arm.

"Whew!—but you've got the advantage of me!" exclaimed the policeman.

Jepworth smiled.

"Men in our profession get acquainted without knowing it sometimes—by reputation, you understand. I've heard of you. You did some good work a month ago, pulling in some burglars who visited this town. Those burglars were sharp men, and we officers in New York have had dealings with them. That is why Mr. Hunt told me to enlist your assistance in this case."

Jules Jepworth could not have talked more fluently had he been speaking the truth, instead of spinning a cleverly concocted fiction.

Wilson, the rural officer, who had in the case to which the other alluded merely acted a minor part in arresting some very bungling burglars, was flattered by the words of this keen-eyed stranger, until he actually began to think that he had, indeed, done a tremendously clever thing.

How else, he asked himself, could his name have become so familiar to this person?

"Well, that was a pretty fair piece of work, if I do say it," he admitted.

Then he remembered that he did not know the name of the admiring stranger.

"But you intimated that we were known to each other by reputation. I wish I could call you by name, but for the life of me——"

"Don't let that trouble you, Wilson!" smiled Jepworth. "You don't know me personally, of course, as I shouldn't you if I had not been to the trouble to make some inqui-

ries before I arrived here. You have heard of Hunt, Hall & Hyde, of New York?"

"Hunt, Hall & Hyde!—the three H's—heard of them—well I should say so. Why, I believe they're famous from one end of the country to the other. But you don't mean to tell me——"

Jules Jepworth smiled and bowed with a becoming modesty.

"I am the one who is reported as calling himself the sandwich of the firm—Mr. Hall."

It may, or may not, have been fortunate that Quimby Hall, the real "sandwich" of the firm, was not at hand to hear this bold declaration.

Be that as it may, Jules Jepworth, the invincible safe-breaker, uttered the fiction with an assurance that left no room for doubt in the credulous mind of Wilson, the policeman.

The copious, yet delicate flattery of the stranger had sufficiently befogged his perceptions to render him prepared to "swallow" anything that the agreeable stranger might say.

"Mr. Quimby Hall!" exclaimed Wilson, extending a welcoming hand.

"Mr. Quimby Hall, of New York," smiled Jepworth.

"But," he added, with a swift glance around, "this is no time nor place for a friendly chat, however agreeable it might be to both of us. I am here to prevent a crime. I shall depend upon you for the assistance which I shall require. We have a desperate crook to balk and arrest. Can I depend upon you?"

"Who—who is the crook?" Wilson faltered.

"His name," said the other, looking the policeman in the eye, "is Jules Jepworth, chief of the safe-breakers."

Was ever a bold scheme so boldly inaugurated?

What was to be the outcome?

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE WOMAN IN THE CASE.

"There is a woman even in this case!"

The speaker was Quimby Hall of the "three H's."

He stood near the door of Hunt, Hall & Hyde's private office in the city of New York; and the one he was addressing was the senior partner of the firm, Mr. Rexford Hunt.

The latter had been rapidly pacing the floor for some minutes and his, smooth, round, keen face wore a look of unusual excitement.

He paused abruptly, confronting the younger man in response to the latter's decisive announcement.

"I suppose you have some reason for making that declaration, Quimby?" he returned, meeting the calm gaze of the other.

"You may gamble on it that I have," was the reply.

"Well, who is the woman this time? And to which particular case do you refer?"

"I refer to our little plan to break up the safe-breakers' gang; and the woman in question, so far as I know, bears only the name of Lena. I saw her last night in Gopher's pawnshop, on the Bowery. She was there to redeem a gold watch—and as both the girl and the watch were beauties I watched where they went."

"That is like you, Quimby—I mean, the keeping of a pretty girl in sight. But if she is the sort to go to Gopher's very frequently my advice is that you beware lest your



sympathy for her gets the upper hand of your good judgment."

"Much obliged, Rex, for the advice—and you ought to know. But this isn't to the point. I followed the girl, and know where she puts up. That isn't all—I got a glimpse of the watch, and a word with the girl."

"I suppose there is something significant in the fact else you wouldn't have mentioned it?"

"You may gamble on it, Rex."

The young man was in a more secretive mood than usual. There seemed to be something which he was considering whether it were best to disclose to the older man at this stage of affairs.

"Come, Quimby, you had better let me have it!" said Rexford Hunt, with a keen smile.

"Just as you say."

The young man let go of the door which he had been on the point of opening and dropped into the nearest chair.

"The girl," he resumed, speaking with uncommon deliberateness, "was, as I said before, very pretty. And her face wasn't of the ordinary wish-washy sort, either. It was a strong face, and when I overtook her just as she was about to enter the miserable rookery where she evidently makes it her home, she turned on me with a flash like a young bolt of lightning."

"Beg pardon," says I. "But I would like to look at that gentleman's watch which you just took out of pawn at Gopher's. It is an uncommonly pretty watch," said I.

"She stared at me a moment, and then demanded, just as imperatively as she could have done if she had put a pistol to my head:

"What do you want of the watch, sir? To seize it and run off, I dare say!"

"Oh, no," said I, with the most killing smile I could muster. "I can get all the watches I care to make time for me by buying them in the regular way. But, you see, it isn't exactly the thing for a girl who lives in such quarters as these to own such a time-piece as the one you redeemed at Gopher's."

"In a minute I saw tears spring into her eyes. That touched the soft spot in my heart, but you may gamble on it that I didn't tell her so. Instead, I put on a stern look and said:

"If the watch is yours, all right; if not, just tell me a straight story, and it may be all right. I'm a detective, and a man has lost a watch something like that."

"She didn't wilt—not at all. She looked at me sharp as a hawk for a minute and then said:

"Let me see whether you are a detective or not!"

"I showed her the piece of tin inside my coat and then she whipped out the watch and said:

"Look at it if you want to—it isn't stolen property, and I'm not ashamed to have all the officers in the city see whose it is."

"Well, you looked at it?" said Hunt, as the "sandwich" of the firm paused.

"I looked at it, Rex."

"And found a name, or something engraved on it?"

"A name on the inside of the case."

"And it was a name you recognized?"

"It was the name of Jules Jepworth!"

"Whew!"

Rexford Hunt took a turn about the room, and brought up again facing his partner.

"Then your pretty girl is something or another to the

boldest chief of the boldest safe-breakers' gang in the country!"

"Yes, but that isn't the odd part of it. You see, she wasn't shy about showing me the watch after she knew I wasn't a thief. In other words, she was not afraid of me as a detective either for herself or on account of Jepworth. Now, with your long head for solving riddles, tell me the meaning of that circumstance?"

Rexford Hunt stroked his chin meditatively while the two men gazed keenly into each other's face.

"Let me save this one pull on my brain," said Hunt, at last, "and give me your hypothesis, for I see you made one."

"All right," smiled the other. "It isn't so very blind, as I look at it. This pretty girl who takes Jules Jepworth's watch out of the soup doesn't dream that Jules is the crookedest crook in Crookdom! Whatever she may be to our safe-breaker, she doesn't dream that he is what he is. The girl may be his wife, or daughter, or—well, just his girl. You know Jimmie Hope married a nice woman, and she did not find out for a long time what his business was. And at last, when she did find out, she did what most true women will do, under the same circumstances—she stuck. I don't say that this Lena is the wife of Jules Jepworth—I hope she isn't. But, as I said before, she doesn't dream that he is chief of a safe-breakers' gang."

Rexford Hunt listened to the young man's speech with the closest attention. He was coming to place more and more confidence in the hypotheses of the genial, alert young detective.

Jules Jepworth with his gang of safe-breakers was becoming a scourge among the banks and all institutions where large amounts in money or valuables were stored.

More than one safe in railway stations had been opened as quickly as though it were but a simple wooden box with an ordinary lock.

Few of the safes or vaults broken into by this gang were blown open in the ordinary way, with the attendant risk from noise.

Many were opened by means of the combination locks, as though the burglars were acquainted with the magic symbol by which they were closed.

Others were so quickly and thoroughly riddled with holes by means of a powerful, swift-acting burglar's drill, that the locks were fairly removed from the door, and the safety-vault practically ruined.

Many safes and money-vaults in the city of New York had originally suffered from the depredations of the mysterious gang. But later, when the police became so thoroughly aroused in the city that the hazard of working there was too great, smaller cities and towns began to suffer, at no great distance from New York, however.

What was yet more peculiar, was the fact that safes were broken open simultaneously, even to the moment, in several places quite distant from each other.

Jules Jepworth himself was well known, and he had a faculty for committing the boldest and most unexpected crimes in his line.

Then he would audaciously flaunt his success in the very teeth of the police.

Although Hunt, Hall & Hyde were apprised of the various successes of the safe-breakers' gang, they did not begin to work on the case until about a week before the date at which our story opens.

Since the regular police had failed to capture any of the



gang, or to prevent their success in any instance, the "three H's" assumed from the start that ordinary methods of detective investigation and working would not succeed.

And it was in extraordinary methods that this famous trio had made their reputation.

"It is tolerably clear, Quimby, that this girl whom you met so curiously, is connected with Jules Jepworth, and that your idea concerning the situation is mainly correct. But what do you propose to do about it? If the girl mistrusts your real purpose, she will not be an easy one to pump for information, to judge by the experience you have had with her already."

"I'll find out what she is to him before I try to get any other point from her concerning him."

"And if she should turn out to be his wife?"

"Then I wouldn't try to get any other facts through her."

"That tender conscience of yours!" said Hunt, laughing, in his genial way. For the older man liked Quimby the better for the occasional glimpse of the latter's scruples.

"Secrets between husband and wife are too sacred for me to meddle with. A man certainly deserves to feel secure in that quarter, even if he cleans out all the banks and safety-vaults in Christendom!"

Quimby spoke with a warmth that indicated more than a passing feeling upon this point. At the same time he opened the door to depart.

"To see the pretty Lena?" Rexford Hunt called after him.

"Yes—to see the pretty Lena!" was the reply. And the "sandwich" of the "three H's" was gone.

It was late in the afternoon.

A damp rain had begun to fall, and the young detective hurried along the quietest streets to escape the throng of hoisted umbrellas.

At Union Square he entered a Bowery car, and a quarter of an hour later alighted in front of one of the numerous three-story, nondescript buildings which one may see at any point in this unique thoroughfare.

As he approached the entrance he noticed that a telegraph messenger boy had just rung the bell at the door he himself designed opening.

He held his record book in his hand, and as the detective briskly advanced the boy cast a quick glance up into his face.

"Got a telegram for somebody here?" Quimby Hall asked.

"What yer thinks I'm here for, if I haven't got one—hey?" the boy demanded.

"For Lena Jepworth?" pursued the detective.

"Think I'm a talkin'-machine, don't yer?"

"Or it might be for Jules himself," persisted the other.

"Jules—who?"

And the boy's face showed interest in spite of an attempt to hide the emotion.

"Why, Jules Jepworth, that you've read so much about in the papers lately. You know whom I mean, if you carry your wits about with you."

"Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker?"

"Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker."

The boy jerked the bell without replying.

Quimby Hall stood quietly by and waited till the door was opened by—the pretty Lena herself!

## CHAPTER V.

### THE IRON DOOR.

Jules Jepworth, the king of the safe-breakers' gang is not the hero of our tale; yet he is such an important character that we cannot proceed farther without again giving him our attention.

Wilson, the credulous policeman, had heard of Jules Jepworth; and to have this keen-eyed stranger, who had flattered his vanity so liberally, declare that the work which they were to do was of no less importance than the capture of the famous safe-breaker was enough to nearly turn upside down what few sane wits he had left in his head.

"Jules Jepworth, chief of safe-breakers!" Wilson echoed, in a faint voice.

"Yes," said the other, showing his white teeth.

"And you mean to say that he is in this town?"

"I have the best reasons for believing him to be here at this moment."

"And of course he is here for mischief!"

"Not very likely that he is here just for a joke. And let me tell you that if you want a little glory and a big reward, or a share in one, you will never have a better chance than the present. Why, you will be sure to see your name in every newspaper in this part of the country within forty-eight hours. So say the word!—are you ready to be in it, or not?"

"Of course, Mr. Hall, of course! Just give me your plans and I'll add such suggestions as my familiarity with this city may make useful. Perhaps I had better run up to headquarters and see the cap'n—"

"Perhaps not!" Jepworth grimly replied.

"Just as you think best, of course. Only I didn't know but we should feel better if we knew there was help handy in case there should be a fight with this—this Jepworth."

"There will be no fight with this Jepworth," smiled the other, significantly.

"Then you expect to take him without resistance?"

"He won't resist me! We know each other, and when it comes to close quarters, and I say the word, you may bet your top dollar on your bottom card that Jules Jepworth will ante up mighty handsome!"

These significant and bold utterances of the audacious safe-breaker were to recur to the mind of the innocent Wilson with peculiar and humiliating force at a later date.

"Well, I'm at your command," declared Wilson, who was only too eager to win a share of the promised glory.

"Well, then, you are to go around to the rear door of this bank building and call out the janitor."

"To tell him to be on his guard?"

"Precisely. Jepworth is at this moment on these premises and making ready to go through the vault of your national bank. He will take no definite action for nearly an hour yet. There are members of his gang in three different towns at this very moment, preparing for the same kind of a job. You remember reading how they broke into three banks at exactly two o'clock in the morning something like a week ago? The time-locks told the story. Well, two o'clock is the hour agreed upon between Jules and the members of his gang for this night's work. And the other two members of the three H's are preparing, as you and I are, to frustrate the efforts and capture



the other members of the gang. You see it is a great scheme, but a sharper counter scheme!"

Wilson realized the importance of paying scrupulous heed to every detail uttered by this keen-eyed individual who seemed to have the plans of the safe-breakers' gang down so fine.

"What will I say to the janitor?"

"Tell him to get his pistols and wait outside with you till you give him the word."

"When am I to give him the word?"

"When I give the signal to you."

"How will you do that?"

Jules Jepworth produced a small silver whistle.

"You will hear this," he said.

And again the sharper indulged in one of his peculiar smiles, which, under other conditions, might have aroused a suspicion of something astray even in the befogged intellect of Wilson, the policeman.

"You see," Jules Jepworth continued, "the burglar knows that the janitor acts also as watchman in the bank, and he is prepared to give him a dose that will keep him quiet till his work is done. By calling out the watchman, as I suggest, you will save him unnecessary risk of his life, and at the same time both of you will stand ready to cut off the retreat of our game in that direction."

"That's a good idea, and the watchman ought to thank you for it!" exclaimed Wilson.

Judging the supposed detective's vanity by his own, he thought to win the other's good opinion, and possibly a plum of praise, by lauding the excellence of every proposition made by him.

"One word more," said Jepworth, and there was a look of stern command in his keen dark eyes as he spoke.

"We have done a deal of work perfecting our plans for this capture, and if we are to win it must be through the scrupulous carrying out of the details as I have laid them down. You are not to attempt anything brilliant on your own hook, whatever may occur to your mind. You know," added the invincible safe-breaker, recollecting that a command would be best heeded if it were sweetened by another drop of flattery; "you know, Mr. Wilson, that if you were arranging to carry out one of your own shrewdest schemes against the crooks, you could execute your plans best without any interference, even if you had the three H's under your command!"

"That's true—that's true!" said Wilson, the look of tickled vanity on his honest face well paying the other for his effort.

"Are you ready, then? And are you willing to carry out my plans as I have given them, to the very letter?"

"Yes, to the very letter."

"Then we will be about it. Remember, that you are to do nothing until you hear my signal. Above all things, as your experience no doubt has told you, our business requires patience, even more than it does courage."

"That's it, Mr. Hall. Just what I was about to say," said Wilson, out of the simple honesty of his heart.

"Now go around to the rear door as I have suggested, and speak to the watchman. I can trust you to restrain him from doing anything rash. And of course he will have the fullest confidence in your judgment. That is all. Now I am ready."

Jules Jepworth shook hands with the policeman, so sealing the friendly compact. In another moment Wilson was out of sight.

Jepworth stood for a moment, and then approached

the front entrance of the bank, glanced furtively up and down the street to see that no one was in sight to observe him, and then, with only a moment's delay—scarcely more than it would have required had he possessed the proper key—he opened the door and went in.

How did he unlock the door?

To him the lock of a door was a simple obstacle at any time. To Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker, the mechanism of a Yale lock was nothing.

Once inside, he paused for a moment to listen.

The interior of the small banking-room was dimly lighted by a single gas-jet behind the railing.

He could see the clock over the vault, and the hands told him that it was a little past one.

"No hurry," he smiled, as he made his way behind the railing and stood for a moment in thought beside the cashier's desk.

He heard a door at the rear of the building open and close.

"That is the watchman, gone out to see our innocent policeman. What if he should happen to be suspicious? But no—little danger of that. They don't employ geniuses in that capacity. He will rely on the judgment of this Wilson, and Wilson is too much in love with his own brilliance to suspect that he has been imposed upon. I am as safe from intrusion here as though I were the watchman himself. Ah!—who now?"

Jepworth saw a man cross over from the opposite side of the street and approach the window.

The safe-breaker retreated hastily to an obscure corner, experiencing a sudden feeling of dismay.

What if the policeman had been "playing off?" What if he were less gullible than he had seemed?

What if he had suspected the game of Jules Jepworth from the first? What if detectives had warned him to be on the lookout for the noted opener of safes?

These queries came in a torrent to the brain of the safe-breaker in that moment of breathless suspense.

Successful as he had always been, he well knew there was likely to come a time when failure would come. And that time would of course arrive when he was most sanguine of success.

That pang of fear was but the natural fruit of a life of crime. It was not the first that he had experienced, nor was it to be the last.

The figure reached the window and a face peered into the bank.

But it did not pause. He turned away and hurried along the street in the most unconcerned manner.

"A belated pedestrian who wanted to see the time!" Jules Jepworth exclaimed, while he wiped the beads of perspiration that suddenly started out upon his white brow.

"But my thrill of fear warns me that there is no time to lose—that I must not play with fate too audaciously now that I know that the police in every town are aroused. Now for the lock of this vault—one of the simplest, I see—one which, perhaps, I made myself. If so, ten minutes of probing will give me the combination, and the contents will be mine!"

He opened the small valise which he carried, displaying some of the lightest of the burglar's tools that are now in use.

For the other members of his gang, it was necessary to use the ordinary, or specially made tools of the most powerful sort. But Jules Jepworth differed from others of his



profession in the fact that he usually defied combination locks by his skill, rather than by the use of drills.

From the valise he took a tiny instrument, the secret of whose mechanism he guarded from view with jealous care, even though he were certain that no curious eyes were peeping in upon him.

He stood in front of the ponderous door of the vault, worked silently and rapidly for a short time, and then uttered an exclamation of triumph.

"Done!" he murmured, and twirled the knob dexterously to and fro with his fingers.

"Click!"

The ponderous door swung open. Jules Jepworth stepped into the vault.

Clang! The heavy door closed upon him!

## CHAPTER VI.

### PROBING THE MYSTERY.

Lena saw the boy who brought the telegram before she noticed the detective standing behind him. She took the telegram, signed the book, and was about to open and read the message when the shrewd youngster said:

"Better go in and read yer dockyment, less yer wants this yere bloke to know more about yer business than yer knows yerself!"

With this warning, and an exultant grin at the detective, the boy darted away.

"You have seen me before, and know, Miss Lena, that you have nothing to fear," said Quimby Hall in his quiet, reassuring tones, as the girl cast a swift, apprehensive glance into his handsome face.

"Ah!—so it is Mr. Hall again!" she exclaimed.

"The sandwich of the three H's, at your service, miss," smiled Quimby.

"You came to see me?"

"Yes, Miss Lena. But don't let me detain you from reading your message."

"It isn't for me," she returned, glancing at the superscription on the envelope.

She proceeded, however, to tear it open, as though she felt herself to be privileged to do so.

"It is for your husband, then?" Quimby carelessly pursued.

She looked at him suddenly, while a bright flush mantled her pretty cheeks.

"You just called me 'Miss Lena!'" she laughed.

"You will excuse me—you are so young," the other answered, while his pulse beat high with eagerness for the truth which he thought was coming in her next words.

"I am twenty," she replied, the blush fading slowly as she read the telegram, and folding it, replaced it in the envelope.

When her eyes again met those of the detective he beheld a marvelous change in their expression.

A moment before they had been mild and almost friendly; but now there was a flash of hatred in them, as though she had been suddenly inspired by that feeling.

"Did you come to see that watch again?" she demanded, her voice assuming a hard, steel-like ring.

"No, I came to see you."

"To ask me questions, I suppose?"

"You need answer only one, if that one be in the affirmative!"

And his calm, penetrating gaze looked into the clear blue of her eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"That there is one question which I wish to ask, and if you reply affirmatively to that I will trouble you in that way no further. If you answer in the negative I may have to put a few more queries. That is all."

"What is the important question, then?"

"Are you the wife of Jules Jepworth?"

A moment of breathless silence followed. The young woman gazed at the other, and her eyes did not flinch under the magnetic power of the detective's.

"If I say 'yes' you will not ask me to tell you more?"

"If you so answer, and I see that it is truthfully."

"And if I say 'no?'"

"You are trying to have me commit myself to some course. I am not the one under examination. You will tell me what I wish to know first and most. There may be those who will not give you the latitude in answering questions that I have offered. I am not the only detective in the world, and you may be sure that there are others who will come to you for information."

"About Jules Jepworth?"

"Yes."

"What has he done? Tell me that? I believe there are enemies working secretly against him, and that you are one of them. Tell me, true—are you?"

"I work in the cause of justice, and I am the enemy of no man. Perhaps Jules Jepworth is my enemy instead of my being his."

"No, no! He is the kindest man living."

"Is he your husband?"

"I do not wish to tell you."

"If he is, by telling me you will save yourself and perhaps him from a great deal of trouble."

"And if I refuse to tell you?"

"You will be arrested!"

Lena, the strangely beautiful young woman, in whom "the sandwich" of the "three H's" momentarily felt a growing sense of interest and confidence, compressed her lips and bent her brows in intense thought.

"I feel that you are an innocent young woman, and that you really wish to do what you believe to be best and right," Quimby added, so kindly that she flashed a quick look of gratitude up into his face.

She stepped back and flung the door open wide.

"Will you come in?" she asked. "I wish to talk with you, and I think I can explain what seems to be dark to you."

"Perhaps she can explain that Jules Jepworth is at heart a very exemplary man, but that he is under bad influences!" thought Quimby, with a smile.

He followed her in, and up a narrow, steep flight of stairs.

Never in his life had he entered a place with less thought of danger than now.

Even had he been convinced that Lena was really the wife of the famous safe-breaker, he would have apprehended no treachery from her.

He was ushered into a small, poorly lighted room which was evidently used as a kitchen. The room was tidily kept, but the furniture was cheap and meager.

It looked like the ordinary abode of poverty.

Lena placed a chair for her visitor and excusing herself went hastily from the room. She went out by the same door by which they had entered, closing it after her.



Quimby was sure that he heard the click of a bolt as the door shut.

He rose quietly and tried the door.

"The minx!" he exclaimed.

His ears had not deceived him; the door was locked, and the key removed.

He felt no alarm; but he was intensely curious to discover the real purpose of this strange young woman.

"What in the world does she mean?" he asked himself.

"Does she think a common lock will shut up the sandwich of the three H's? Or was she afraid that I might take a notion to explore the premises while she was out of the room? This is a queer go, and I'll be blessed if I'm not more at a loss what to do than I would be if I were shut in here by the invincible Jules Jepworth himself! Ah!—what now?"

He was silenced by the sound of voices, coming, apparently, from the other side of the partition.

The detective listened intently, for the voices sounded so distinct that there seemed to be a promise of distinguishing what was said.

The speakers were a man and a woman, and the latter he knew must be Lena.

"He is here to ruin me!" exclaimed the man, in a rasping voice, whose very fierceness seemed to have a magnetic quality in it.

"But he does not know you are here now—as, indeed, I did not until this moment. I can send him away without his suspicions being further excited. He cannot be detained; and if he goes, it must be with as few suspicions as we can leave with him. Please, Jules!—please let me manage it all, for it will be so much better for us both!"

The voice of Lena was low and pleading. And she called her companion Jules!

"Enough has been said!" snarled the man. "If you were to manage my affairs for me you would make friends with all the detectives in New York! I tell you, there is a conspiracy abroad to ruin me! That smooth-spoken man is at the bottom of it! Go to your room, Lena, and lock yourself in. When I am ready for you to come out I will speak to you! Do you hear me? Go!"

There was a moan of anguish from the girl that sent an indignant thrill through the heart of the listener.

But the latter had no time to sympathize with Lena then. He drew a revolver and calmly awaited the outcome.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A STRANGE COMPACT.

A fierce, half-horrified snarl broke from the lips of Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker, as he heard the door of the bank vault close upon him.

He turned and flung his weight against the ponderous door, but to no purpose. It was closed and locked!

For a moment he stood motionless, trying to collect his thoughts for an effort at self-preservation.

Who had shut the vault door?

This was the prime question, and the one upon which his chances of final escape hung.

Had he been seen by the person who came along and peered in at the clock? And had that individual summoned a policeman?

It seemed incredible that any one could have gained an entrance to the banking-room while he was there without

giving some sign of their presence, for even when he was most closely engaged upon the lock he had kept a sharp lookout.

"No one came in since I entered!" was his mental verdict.

"So it follows," he added, with a calm swiftness of thought, "that either some one was concealed here when I arrived, else something besides human hands closed the door! Which was it?"

Jules Jepworth listened, placing his ear against the iron door. But he could hear no sound save the strong pulsations of his own heart.

"What, in the name of all the fiends, does it mean?" he exclaimed, half aloud.

The sepulchral sound of his own voice reminded him of a present danger that menaced his very life—a danger that was greater within than the worst that might be encountered without.

The vault was of moderate size; it was probably nearly, if not quite, air-tight; therefore it were but a matter of time when he must succumb to suffocation unless he should gain some means of ventilation in season.

At the moment when he stepped into the vault he had his bag of tools with him. They were at hand now. And with a promptness which was characteristic of everything this remarkable man undertook, he set himself to work.

The delicate instrument by means of which he had opened the door from the outside would be of no use to him now—at least, not yet.

In a moment he was at work with a small but powerful drill which was a machine of his own manufacture and invention.

It worked so silently that one must have stood close to the door of the vault to have heard a sound from it.

He was drilling directly into the mechanism of the lock, with every part of which he was as thoroughly familiar as a watch-maker is with that of a watch.

So swiftly did the drill work that in a few moments he had accomplished with it all that was required.

If the door had been closed by one wishing to shut him in, the knob on the outside would have been turned so that he would have to get at that before he could escape.

Otherwise, if the door merely swung to under the impetus of a strong draught of air, or by its own weight upon hinges that time had unsettled in their bearings, he would now be able to open the door without delay.

Here was further cause for him to hesitate.

If some one was on the watch outside, to open the vault door meant capture or death.

"But I must take the risk!" he muttered.

With the tiny instrument with which he had first opened the door he now set to work, inserting it in the hole which he had drilled.

Click!—he pushed upon the door—it swung back—he was free!

He bounded out, revolver in hand.

But the room was silent and deserted.

He made a thorough search of the room; but there was no sign of human presence. But as he stumbled against a huge waste-basket, something scurried forth from behind it and leaped upon the cashier's desk.

It was a huge, black cat, and there the animal arched her back and glared at him with her yellow eyes in a manner that gave him a thrill of indescribable horror.

"That is the beast that guards the bank at night better



than the watchman does!" he exclaimed, for a moment watching the angry feline with a strange feeling of fascination.

"What," he added, "if there really be something in the evil omen that a black cat is reputed to bring! Why, he came near doing what the sharpest and bravest officers in the country have failed to do—to get the better of Jules Jepworth!"

The safe-breaker turned once more to his work. It was nearly two o'clock. There was no telling how soon something might happen to interrupt him.

He had done too much to leave the treasure now. Not that he cared so much to possess the money which he knew the vault must contain; but he was chiefly reluctant to depart and have it published on the morrow that Jules Jepworth had failed.

"I have never failed!" he uttered from betwixt his shut teeth.

He swung the door of the vault open wide and placed a chair against it. As he did so he looked again at the cat.

The animal alighted from the desk and was sniffing and purring in a peculiar manner about a large linen duster that was thrown carelessly, probably by the cashier, over a chair in a remote corner of the room.

"What is the meaning of that?" Jepworth asked himself.

A few swift strides brought him to the chair; in a flash he had thrown aside the duster; a low, feminine cry of dismay broke the silence!

While a revolver seemed to leap into the hand of the burglar, he yet felt no alarm, nor did his eyes falter as they met those of the beautiful young woman who rose shrinkingly from her place of concealment.

"Spare me!" she uttered, in a low, tremulous voice.

"And why should I do so? You would have shut me into that vault to die a miserable death!"

"No, no!—I meant to release you!"

"To fall into the hands of the police."

"No, not that."

"Do you expect me to believe that you shut that door when you knew I was inside, and did it merely as a joke?"

"I did it to give myself time. Believe me, I had no thought of betraying you to the police. How could I have done that without telling them that I was here?"

"And so you don't care to have the police know that you were hiding under a linen duster in the bank, and at midnight! Well, come to think of it, that might not be an agreeable confession for a pretty young woman to make in court!"

The thin lips of Jules Jepworth curled in a satirical smile as he spoke. And the eyes of the young woman fell under his penetrating gaze.

She knew in that moment that he read an inkling of her secret. At the same time he quietly put up his weapon, for which he evidently anticipated no further need in his dealings with her.

"Madam," he exclaimed, and there was the ring of steel in his tones. "Let us understand each other. The night-watchman and a policeman are waiting at the rear entrance of this building. The officer is a very kind man, and will give me considerable time to accomplish the business which brought me here. Still, even his patience may be exhausted, and then he would be compelled to interrupt us. So it is best we talk and act while we may. I do not know what brought you here, but I know that you are as anxious to escape discovery as I am. You know

what I came to do, and I must have a like measure of your confidence. Then perhaps we may help each other—who knows? By your dress and airs I can see that you are a lady; you do not belong to the vulgar herd. Neither do I. There are all grades of criminals, and you and I belong to the aristocratic element among crooks. Don't cringe because I speak plainly. I may not be so hard as I look. Madam, what is your name?"

She had risen and stood leaning against the desk. Her face was very pale, yet there was an invincible light in her beautiful eyes which the speech of the great safe-breaker had seemed to kindle.

"I am Olive Winthrop, wife of Edgar Winthrop, who is the cashier of this bank!" she declared, her voice low and firm.

"Wife of the cashier—I see! And where is the cashier himself?" pursued Jepworth, upon whom a strong suspicion of the startling truth was already beginning to dawn.

"Gone!" was her answer.

"Skipped?—ran away?"

"He has fled from the city. He will never return!"

"If he can help it, you mean. And drawn a few years' salary in advance, I dare say?"

"He used some of the bank's funds in private speculations, and lost. It is the old story—and he was an honest man at heart!"

"So am I—at heart!" smiled the safe-breaker.

"But he did not intend to take the money without returning it, with every penny of the interest."

"I see! Well, I never intend to return any money that I take, and I make it a point to advertise the fact, so I am honest, though in another way. If I pretended that I opened safety-vaults for pleasure, and that I didn't want the money they contained, I should be dishonest, since I would be hiding my real motives. I mean to accumulate a great fortune in my own way. Your husband and I belong to the same class of honest gentry, only we pursue different methods. See?"

"Yes."

And Olive Winthrop, the wife of the absconding cashier, shuddered, while the invincible light in her eyes grew stronger.

"If your Edgar has had the first pull on that vault, then I'm afraid that I will have a pretty slim show for my pains."

"No, he has taken none of the bank's money with him."

"How is that?"

"He lost all in his speculations. To-morrow the annual examination of the bank will be made by the officials, and his trouble will be discovered."

"When did he go?"

"Four hours ago, on an express train."

"And he didn't take any money with him?"

"He did not have fifty dollars in his pocket."

"Fool that he was, then! Why, if he was going to clear out, didn't he put enough in his pocket while he was about it, so that he would not have to give himself up to the authorities to keep himself and you from starving? And with a pretty young wife, too!"

Olive Winthrop's eyes glistened.

"That is what I said to him!" she exclaimed, in a husky whisper.

"You told him that, did you? Good! Well, did you overcome his scruples?"

"Yes. But it was too late then for him to come back



and get the roll of money which he said he might easily have taken with him."

Jules Jepworth smiled understandingly.

"And so he took the train, and left you to get the roll of money? I see. He gave you the safe combination. That is why you were here—and why we have so strangely met!"

"Yes. He goes away alone. The money would be missed to-morrow, and they would think he had taken it with him. I was to send him enough for his needs, and later, when the chase ceased, and he felt himself to be secure, I would join him in his chosen retreat. And," added the young woman, while her pallor was suddenly illumined by a glow of triumph, "we would not have to starve, or would we be so despised by those we had robbed as we would be if we were ignominiously captured and humbled!"

"Good!" smiled Jules Jepworth.

"Now I have told you all. I do not think we can afford to betray each other, although of course I do not expect now to succeed in my mission."

"You think I mean to take what the vault contains and leave you and Edgar out in the cold, eh!"

"A thousand dollars would enable me to join my husband. There are ninety thousand in the vault—in cash! If you could generously spare one ninetieth part of the treasure, when if you had been ten minutes later I should have had all!"

Jules Jepworth stepped silently to the open vault and beckoned her to follow.

She stood at his side, trembling with strange emotions.

"You know where the cash is," he said, quietly. "Get it and bring it out. Lose no time!"

She stepped into the vault, and with keys opened several compartments. In another moment she rejoined the safe-breaker and her hands clutched bulky bunches of greenbacks.

"Give a thousand to pay my expenses," said Jepworth, meeting her gaze. "And keep the rest! Don't stop to utter thanks—thrust the money under your cloak, and go! I will cover your retreat!"

Was there ever a stranger compact than this?

## CHAPTER VIII.

### BALKED!

The morning papers chronicled the robbery of the small railway station safe; and also, in prominent head-lines, proclaimed the flight of Edgar Winthrop, the defaulting bank cashier.

This, however, was not all the important news on this theme, which the newspapers of that morning had to record.

There was one case in which lawlessness had played a losing game.

By a brilliant and unexpected stroke of detective skill engineered by Kirk Hyde, the eccentric "tail-ender" of the "three H's," two members of Jules Jepworth's safe-breakers' gang had been captured and foiled in an attempt to break into another bank, in a town ten miles distant from that where Jepworth himself had operated so successfully.

These two safe-breakers had been right-hand men of their leader's, and with the exception of Jepworth himself, there were no others whom it would be so difficult to outwit.

Having lodged his prisoners in the nearest jail for safe-keeping, Kirk Hyde, the dwarf-detective, returned to the railway station where Tad Silsby reigned as night operator.

Tad was there, although it was the time of day when he should have been asleep. But the exciting events of the previous night had been too great to allow him to sleep until he had repeated the details of his experience to every person in the neighborhood whom he could secure as a listener.

"Well, Silsby," said the dwarf, sidling up to the youthful giant in his squirming fashion. "You found out that the three H's were on deck last night, after all. At the rate of two at a scoop, Jules Jepworth's gang won't last a great while—eh?"

"Gosh!—but I didn't think you had anything in the wind but followin' Jepworth himself when you went away from here last night," said Tad, looking down at the uncouth figure before him.

"And what do you think is in the wind, now? Do you suppose the tail-ender of the three H's is squirming around here without an object?"

"Likely he ain't. I guess you're in for another scoop."

"A tolerable close guess, only this is to be a slow scoop, instead of a quick one like the last. I knew there was no use in my trying to follow Jules Jepworth last night, for I didn't know where he was steering for, and no man living can follow him when he is out on one of his expeditions, without his detecting the fact. Oh, Jules is a hard man to beat, and I knew he was up to something, and didn't know exactly what! He cleaned out your safe here, but that was just one of his jokes. He doesn't call that serious business, and likely he didn't think of doing it till he come in here and saw the safe. So it follows that he was not so anxious to reach a certain destination last night without having an object. Now, do you know where he went after leaving here?"

"Hain't got 'ary an idea," said Tad.

The dwarf had entered the little office, and closed the door. So they were alone, although there were loungers in the waiting-room and outside on the platform.

"Did you read about the affair in the bank in the little city which is the nearest to this station?"

"'Bout the cashier runnin' off with the funds?"

"That's it."

"Wall, Jepworth didn't do that."

"Perhaps not; but Jules Jepworth meant to go through that bank last night, just the same!"

"How d'ye know?"

"Read this. Mind, I'm telling you this because I need your help and I expect you to keep your mouth close. I'm told by the station agent here that you may be depended upon, and that I may have your hlep, if you are willing to take a hand in the capture of the man who made you do what you didn't want to do last night. What do you say?"

"I'll pitch in in that cause, tooth and nail, by hickory!"

"There may be some tooth and nail business in the racket before we are through. But you will work under my orders, if you work at all; and my orders are those under which the three H's work in harmony."

"That's straight, and I'll do as you say."

"First, to the telegram which I received this morning. It is from Rexford Hunt, whom we sometimes call the head-light of the three H's. This is what he says:



"Jules Jepworth was in city of Y—last night. Fooled policeman there, calling himself Hall of three H's. Cashier of Y—National Bank missing with funds this morning. Jepworth meant to rob the bank, lock tampered with. Go find connection between missing cashier and Jepworth's presence."

"(Signed) R. H."

"Glory!—that looks queer!" exclaimed Tad Silsby, who was keen enough to scent an uncommonly deep piece of detective-work called for in the conditions noted in the telegram.

"I want you to go with me to the little city named, and there I will give you special work to do. Or, rather, I will go ahead, and you will follow on next train. We mustn't be seen together. Do you twig?"

"I twig," said Tad, who felt a sense of his own importance to the "three H's" already.

"My train goes in ten minutes—I hear it coming in, now. Your's follows in three hours, and gets you there at just dark. I will manage to see you there at the station. I can depend upon you?"

"To a dot!"

"All right. Now I go. Close mouth, remember!"

The train was in, and soon again it was out, with the "tail-ender" of the "three H's" as a passenger.

Nobody but the conductor knew he was aboard, or of his destination. Not a soul saw him get off.

Like an apparition, he appeared at the door of the robbed bank, and a word of magic to the men on guard gained for him a ready entrance.

He made a hasty, yet thorough, examination of the door of the safe. The night-watchman, a gray-headed man with mild blue eyes, stood by and watched him. The president and directors were at their table, deep in the examinations of books and vouchers.

"I want to see the president of the bank, privately," declared Kirk Hyde.

A moment later he was closeted in a private room with that gentleman, who was a sleek, prosperous looking man of sixty.

"Mr. Dalton," drawled the dwarf, transfixing the gentleman with his visible eye. "I've made a peculiar discovery. Would you like to know what it is?"

"You are Mr. Kirk Hyde?" queried the magnate, arching his aristocratic brows in a haughty manner.

"Tail-ender of the three H's," was the drawling response.

"What have you discovered?"

"That somebody was shut into that vault last night!"

"Somebody shut into the vault! Absurd!"

"Easy enough for you to say so, Mr. Dalton, but you'll have a tough job on your hands, if you try to make change my verdict!"

"How could any one have been shut into the vault?"

"Just step in yourself, Mr. Dalton, and I will show you as quick as a squirrel could wink his eye!"

"No—no, thank you. I don't care for a practical demonstration. But you imply that some one went into the vault last night, and that somebody else shut that person in?"

"Those are just the dimensions of my discovery."

"Why do you think this?"

"Because the lock was drilled into by a very small drill, and afterward operated upon by an instrument that only one man knows how to use for that purpose. This was not done from the outside, since the work shows that

the operator must have worked from within the vault. He did it to get out."

"Are you certain of this?"

"Perfectly. I'll show you why presently. But first to ask a question or two. They tell me that the defaulting cashier was your son-in-law?"

Dalton flushed, but nodded an affirmative without speaking.

"Have you examined the books sufficiently to discover the extent of the bank's loss?"

"I don't think the defalcation in itself will exceed the sum of fifteen thousand dollars."

"But that isn't all?"

Dalton hesitated; but realizing that the truth would be known eventually, he said:

"Mr. Winthrop entered the cash balance on the books last night; but most of the items on both sides of the account were entered yesterday by Mr. Kilhon, the teller. So there could have been no mistake. And these footings show that there should have been ninety thousand dollars in bank and national notes in the vault last night."

"Well, does the cash show up this morning?"

"Not a dollar in the shape I have mentioned. There is the usual amount of coin and silver dollars."

"In other words, you think Mr. Winthrop took the amount named at a single haul before he went away last night?"

"That is the inference."

"On what train is he supposed to have gone?"

"He was driven by his own driver to the next town, and took the train there."

"You know his destination?"

"He purchased no ticket. Of course, telegrams have been sent to intercept him, but as nothing has come of them yet, every hour increases his chances of making good his escape."

Kirk Hyde, of the "three H's," listened to what the other had to say in a pre-occupied way, as though he were thinking of something else.

But at this point he suddenly turned upon the bank president, and, fixing his "good eye" sharply upon the gentleman's countenance, exclaimed:

"Where is Edgar Winthrop's wife?"

Dalton returned the detective's gaze in his most haughty manner, as he answered:

"She is at my house to-day. She does not know where her husband has gone, and, of course, she feels badly. But she will remain with me, and await the outcome of her husband's folly."

"She knew last night that he had gone away?"

"Yes, but he deceived her as to his destination."

"Was she at your house last night, after Winthrop's departure?"

"No. She remained at their home."

"Alone?"

"With two servants."

"Where are they?"

"The servants?"

"Yes."

"Still at the Winthrop residence. I will see that they are paid and discharged to-morrow."

"That is all, Mr. Dalton—only you wanted to see the evidence as to how the safe was opened last night?"

"No, no—not now. There is too much for me to attend to. You take care of the detective business—you and the



police. The financial part is all I care to look after at present."

Like a sinuous shadow Kirk Hyde flitted from the bank to the Winthrop house, and thence, after a brief interview with the servants, to the Dalton residence.

As he approached the latter he saw a close carriage driven rapidly away.

"Whose team was that?" he demanded of a laborer, who stood near watching the departing vehicle.

"Dalton's turn-out, mister," was the reply.

"Who was inside?"

"His daughter, to be sure."

"Olive Winthrop?"

"Yes, sir. And wid the Dalton driver."

Kirk Hyde gave a quick glance up and down the quiet street. A young wheelman came leisurely along, his bicycle running close to the sidewalk where the detective stood.

In a moment he had halted in response to a word from the dwarf; a swift bargain was struck; away sped the wheel with the "tail-ender" of the "three H's" crouching upon the seat.

It seemed literally to fly over the ground.

It was in hot pursuit of the Dalton carriage, and although the latter was drawn by a mettlesome span, the small, silent steed gained every instant.

The vehicle reached the station hardly a length ahead of the wheelman. A train was waiting. A graceful figure sprang from the carriage, and the driver hurried with her to the rear car of the waiting train.

There they separated, without a word. Before Olive Winthrop had reached a seat the train was in motion, and she sunk down with a sigh of intense relief.

But the train suddenly stopped with a jerk. She glanced apprehensively up and beheld Kirk, the dwarf, with his hand on the bell-rope, and his single eye fixed upon her.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ENTRAPPED!

Quimby Hall, the "sandwich" of the "three H's," was in anything but a placid frame of mind.

It was not alone because he realized that there was personal danger impending. He was used to that. But it was the discovery that Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker, and the beautiful and innocent-faced Lena were so closely connected that the latter was bound to warn and abet the crimes of the other.

"I can't understand it!" he exclaimed, half aloud, while he stood with the revolver held in readiness for instant use, and awaiting the next action of the man on the other side of the partition.

"She locked me in when she went out," he mentally continued. "And that shows that she did not wish me to escape till she had seen him. And if she knows his character, she must have understood that in doing that she was practically putting me in the power of the most invincible crook living. And that looks as if she were not as sweet as she looks."

The bitter part of the detective's profession to Quimby Hall was the fact that so many beautiful women were capable of even baser treachery and more merciless actions toward their enemies than were the most brutal members of the professional criminal class of the opposite sex.

He heard the retreating footsteps of Lena; then the opening and closing of a door, and knew by these sounds that the girl had complied with the commands of her companion.

Then a brief interval of absolute silence ensued.

Quimby compressed his lips.

"If they think to keep me here till it suits them to dispose of my remains, they will get sorely left, and I'll gamble on it," he exclaimed, half-aloud.

In another moment he was at work on the lock with his skeleton keys, of which he always carried an ample supply.

The bolt was quickly thrown back, and he knew that he had only to open the door to be free.

"If I go this way, what shall I have gained?" he asked himself.

"I can go out and have some officers step in, and we will have this invincible Jules like a rat in a trap. Why not? And so scoop some glory for the sandwich of the three H's. And, as for the pretty Lena, she is in the soup, and it isn't my fault. But there is something more to think of."

Quimby softly opened the door, and stepped out upon the narrow stair-landing.

It was quite dark there, and absolute silence prevailed.

He had noticed another door, opening, probably, into the room where Lena and the man had met, and whence the sound of their voices came so distinctly.

This door he now cautiously tried. It was not locked; in an instant he had crossed the threshold.

He found himself in a small, neatly furnished sleeping-room. He had no time to take in details, however, for he was abruptly confronted by a tall, powerful man, whose fierce, bright eyes met those of the detective with an expression such as he had never encountered before.

"Ha!—and so this is our visitor!" exclaimed the man, bending his heavy brows into a savage frown.

Quimby Hall still held his revolver in one hand. But after regarding the stranger in silence for a moment, he coolly put up the weapon and folded his arms in token of peace.

"We won't fight, my friend," said Quimby, in his calmest tones. "You see," he added, "it would be a mighty queer thing for two gentlemen to do—to pitch in and have a row before they had been properly introduced. I make it a point, you understand, never to have a row with anybody to whom I have never had a straight introduction."

This was an odd remark to make under the circumstances, yet the keen young detective was presently justified in the presumption that the other would be better dealt with in this manner than in any other.

"Ha!" ejaculated the man, relaxing his frown a trifle.

"Of course," continued Quimby, with the best of good-nature expressed in tones and face, "if you insist upon having a set-to with me, either with pistols or knives, I'll accommodate you, provided you get somebody to properly introduce us to each other. And, also, if we were to use knives, I would consider it a favor if you were to allow me time to sharpen mine, as I got it pretty dull on the bones of the last man I polished off with it. His bones and cartilage were uncommonly gritty."

The stranger's frown relaxed entirely, and by a sudden movement he extended his right hand with the most friendly gesture imaginable.

"We are friends!" he said, with a smile.

"I'll gamble on it that we are!" returned Quimby Hall,



giving the big hand of the stranger such a grip that the latter actually winced.

"Your face is a new one to me," said the fierce man. "But there is that in it that gives me a feeling of fellowship. I hope you have come to stop with us, and to join us in the next one of our grand expeditions?"

The detective in that first swift glance into the face of the stranger had fathomed an unexpected truth.

Whoever, and whatever, this man might be—whether his name was really the same as that of the noted safe-breaker or not—or whether or not he had direct or indirect connection with the safe-breakers' gang, he was himself as wholly irresponsible for his speech or actions as a child.

"The man is certainly a little out in his upper-story—a crank of some sort, who imagines himself to be either the famous safe-breaker, else he is playing off more cleverly than anybody I ever fell in with yet. But I can't understand why Lena was talking to him in the way she did, unless there was a deal of method in his madness. He certainly ordered her about as though he was used to it. And what is more, why did she go to consult him after admitting me? If he was a dangerous lunatic, and she knew it, why didn't she tell me the truth about it, instead of letting me run my nose into danger in this way? But perhaps she thought to keep me out of trouble when she locked me into that room. If she did she missed her reckoning, for if there is a mortal on the spinning surface of this globe who has a faculty for getting into all the close pinches there may be lying round loose, that mortal is Quimby Hall, sandwich of the three H's."

This was the sort of soliloquy, which was running through the mind of the detective while he stood before the now smiling stranger, and tried to get something tangible out of the maze of mystery in which this part of the case seemed involved.

In the first place, although it was clear that this man was a half-crazed crank, and that he might be so managed as not to prove dangerous, it was at the same time equally clear that Lena had something to do with the real Jules Jepworth.

Otherwise, how came she to get the watch bearing his name in the cases, from Gopher, the pawnbroker?

And why did the telegraph boy bring a message hither, for Jules Jepworth, unless such a person made this his home?

But while the detective was revolving these points in his brain, he at the same time decided what to do.

"What sort of an expedition are you getting up, my friend?" Quimby asked. At the same time he drew closer to the stranger and managed to rest one hand on the back of a chair partly behind the other.

"Why, you know, I couldn't think of letting you into our secrets without first obtaining a pledge of secrecy from you."

"What sort of a pledge do you want? I'll swear by the moon—or the sun—or any of the planets——"

"No, no! But you will have to be initiated into our band in the regular way. There will be a formal meeting to-morrow night, and in the meantime you will have to remain in a dark room, and meditate on the habits of prairie dogs."

While the cranky stranger was giving voice to these novel instructions, the hand of the detective, which rested so harmlessly on the chair-back, slowly rose until it was on a level with the collar of the stranger.

"Meditate on the habits of prairie dogs!" he repeated, speaking very fast so that the attention of the other was wholly occupied.

"Well, that is a little tough, when I never saw an animal of the kind you mention; but I suppose I will have to submit if I am to join your distinguished society. But before I abandon myself to the solitary part of the programme, suppose that I do *this*."

The hand which had approached so silently at this moment gripped the other by the collar, jerking him backward, while at the same time one of Quimby's feet tripped those of the cranky individual from under him.

The man came down with a heavy shock that seemed to shake the house to its foundation.

Before he fairly had time to realize what had occurred his hands were manacled, and he was lifted bodily and placed on the bed.

"There you are, my hearty!" exclaimed the detective, pausing long enough to look down into the bewildered face of the cranky stranger.

"Here I am!" he echoed, not offering to stir.

"And I suppose your poor noddle is in such an addled condition that it will be useless to try to get any facts out of you. So I'll bid you good-by, with the hope that you will do all the meditating on the habits of prairie dogs that you feel inclined."

Without another glance at the strange individual, whose vagaries had only served to waste the time of the detective, the latter went from the room, closing and locking the door after him.

"But there is a meaning to all this nonsense, and I'm going to know what it is before I go away," said the "sandwich" of the "three H's," as he returned to the room to which Lena had first conducted him.

He opened the door unhesitatingly; but as he did so he found himself confronted by two powerful ruffians, both of whom flung themselves upon him.

## CHAPTER X.

### A STRANGE VISITOR.

"Come in!"

The request was spoken by Rexford Hunt, the "head-light" of the "three H's," in answer to a quick, decisive knock upon the door of his office.

The hour was late upon the night next following that of the robbery of the bank safe.

While the individual members of the great detective firm did all the actual detective work themselves, they nevertheless employed many assistants in various parts of the country, whose duties were simply to obey special instructions from headquarters.

From these a great many telegrams and letters had been received within the last day or two, and Rexford Hunt was therefore engaged until this late hour in replying to them, and in digesting their contents.

He was surprised to have a caller at that hour. And, while he was thus free in inviting the unknown visitor to enter, he laid his hand carelessly upon the revolver which was always upon his table within easy reach.

The door opened, and a tall, powerful, dark-faced man came in.

The stranger wore colored spectacles; his face was smooth-shaved. He wore a small, jet-black mustache, the ends of which were waxed to points.



"Not what he appears; very well disguised, however," was the quick mental comment of the keen-eyed detective.

"Mr. Hunt?" questioned the visitor, in a deep voice, in which there was a magnetic quality of which the other was instantly conscious.

"At your service. But the hour is late, and I infer your business is important else you would have waited until morning before calling."

"I shall not be in town in the morning, so I had to come now, if at all," was the reply of the stranger.

"Very well; what do you want?"

"I am told that you—or the three H's, as your firm is called—are engaged upon the detection of the famous safe-breaking gang, which has been making so much trouble of late?"

"Who told you so?"

And the sharp eyes of Rexford Hunt seemed to be piercing the disguise of his visitor, and reading the secret behind it.

The other seated himself before replying. He was perfectly cool; he seemed to have a definite purpose in view that no amount of danger could deter him from carrying through.

"I said I was told so," he repeated, his tones taking a more metallic ring. "I suppose it doesn't matter who told me, since all I wish to know is if the information be true."

"If the one who told you," smiled Rexford Hunt, "is a man of truth, believe him; if not, better consult somebody else, if you wish to know. That is all. Anything more I can do for you?"

"Yes. You needn't answer a question if you don't wish to, of course. But perhaps you will listen to what I have to say."

"Depends of how much importance it may be, and the time it takes for you to say it."

"All right; I'll be brief. My name is Morel. I know several things about the safe-breaking gang. Indeed, I have lately been among them—for a special purpose, of course."

"As a detective?" questioned Hunt, as the other paused.

"As a detective. I know their manner of working, and what is more, I know that their leader is a man superior to his followers. He cannot be caught with chaff—you may be sure of that."

The voice of the stranger rose slightly, as though he were deeply in earnest.

"We don't deal in chaff, nor even in bran. But go on. I think I begin to see what you are driving at."

"You think you begin to see?" Morel demanded.

"Yes; but go on."

"I wish to warn you against going the wrong way to work, as you are doing now. Their leader is just as familiar with all your plans and movements as you are."

"Bad for the three H's! But go on!"

"One of your men—the one who calls himself the tail-ender—succeeded in getting the better of two of the gang the other night, and he thinks it a great success. But let me tell you that he began at the wrong end. That very night he had the chief in his clutches, as it were, and let him slide through his fingers. Now, the men he captured are not active workmen in the safe-breaking line, after all. They drew him off on a false scent. They would have broken no safe, if he had not taken them. They were merely dummies, and when they come to be tried it will

come out that they never robbed a safe in their lives. Do you see the point?"

"I see one point; but there may be more than one."

"You are sharp and dry, Mr. Hunt—I have heard of the sharp theories that you work out sitting here at your table. But if you were to see what I have seen you would understand that a man can't catch the sharpest criminal in the country by sitting in his office and giving orders for somebody else to carry out."

"Very good, Mr. Morel. And so you have taken all this trouble to tell me that if I would succeed I must take the open field myself?"

"I have not said that."

"Well, go on."

"I have said that I have been among the safe-breakers, and know how they work. I ought to know what I am talking about, hadn't I?"

"I have no doubt but you know even more than you have said. Indeed, you impress me as being a very knowing man, Mr. Morel. But don't let me interrupt you. As I told you in the beginning, I am very busy and can grant only a brief interview, if I am to have any sleep before another night."

Morel rose, and removed the glasses from his eyes. At the same time he bent a strangely penetrating look into the countenance of the other.

His were eyes which have the power of making an enemy quail, if he were to throw into them all the power of his fierce will.

But he did not attempt to exercise this power upon the calm-faced man before him. He returned the glasses to their position after having wiped them, as though he had removed them for the latter purpose.

"I will detain you only a moment longer," he said, in his deep tones. At the same time he retreated to the door.

"What I honestly wished to do," he continued, "was to do you and your men a favor. I do not say that you cannot win in your attempt to capture Jules Jepworth, chief of the safe-breakers' gang; but I will say that it is too bad for you to play a losing game. I hear that Kirk Hyde and Quimby Hall are brave men. I also have it from one who knows that Jepworth has not only courage, but that he is scrupulous upon a point of honor. He never yet put the life of an innocent man in peril. But if he were to be pushed too hard, I am not sure what he might be tempted to do. I would not—ah!—another late visitor?"

Another knock had sounded upon the door—a sharp, quick rap, that had an imperative sound to it.

Hunt rose, and the visitor stepped away from the door.

With his hand upon the knob, the detective looked the other in the eye.

"If you have said all, you may go out when my other visitor comes in," he hinted.

"I haven't said all."

"Then say it."

"I have questions to put that you may want time for answering."

"Then call in the morning."

"I say I shall not be in town, then."

"Very well—I have given you ample time, Mr. Morel. I know nothing about you. We run our business in our own way. We never take advice. If this isn't sufficiently explicit to inform you what I wish you to do, then I will tell you bluntly to go."

Rexford Hunt's voice assumed a tone of command, and a subtle flame brightened his eyes.



"Is that the way you treat those who call upon you?"  
 "Not all. But it is the way I treat men who come in disguise."

"You think I am disguised?"

"And not so very cleverly."

"And that my name is not Morel?"

"Your true name is not Morel!"

"Then I will go. But remember that——"

Rexford Hunt took a quick stride toward the other, and his one hand fell heavily on the man's shoulder.

"Go!" he thundred.

For an instant the two men faced each other, and it almost seemed as though flames leaped from eye to eye.

Rexford Hunt, calm and mild spoken, was a man of power. His accusing glance had often brought a confession to the lips of a criminal.

But Morel met his gaze without flinching. It was "Greek meeting Greek." The visitor showed his teeth in a smile that was full of defiance.

"You are a fool to refuse to talk with me!" he exclaimed, in a suppressed voice. "I never struck a detective before who wouldn't listen when he scented a bargain. There are things that pay better than man-hunting. Do you know it? I will go to night, but I believe you will puzzle out my meaning before you sleep. Take your hand off, and I will go."

Hunt removed his hand, and accompanied his visitor to the door like one in a dream.

Morel went out, and he heard his retreating footsteps in the corridor. Then he remembered that there had been a knock which he had not answered.

He looked out into the dimly lighted passage.

"It was Morel who knocked—upon the inner side," was his verdict, for the passage was deserted.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A WOMAN WITH "SAND."

Olive Winthrop, the cashier's beautiful wife, experienced a thrill of dreadful fear as she glanced up, and saw that the train had been stopped in response to a signal from the disagreeable-looking dwarf, who at the same time seemed to regard her in such an exultant manner.

She glanced hurriedly up and down the car, as though in meditated flight.

But Kirk Hyde advanced, and touched her arm in a light but significant manner.

"No use," he declared, briefly.

"Who are you?" she whispered.

"You mustn't try to join your runaway husband in such a hurry. You might have known that we should let you do it. Come, madam, get off and return to your carriage. The driver is waiting."

"But you—who are——"

"Hurry, madam, and don't make a scene. You are a pretty woman, and I'm not a pretty man, so I'm willing to save you all the humiliation I can. Get off and return to your carriage. You needn't give any orders to your driver, for I have saved you the trouble by telling him where to take you in advance."

Olive Winthrop, the defaulter's wife, obeyed in silence, but with compressed lips.

A backward glance showed her that the detective was following her. He was speaking to the conductor, doubtless explaining his signal to stop the train.

The young woman was, as we have evidence already from our brief acquaintance with her, a person of extraordinary courage and spirit.

"He has given the driver orders," she thought, and hurried toward the waiting vehicle. "But the Dalton driver is accustomed to obeying me. We will see if he refuses, now."

She reached the carriage, and the man was at hand to open the door for her, with his usual courtesy.

"Where were you told to take me, John?" she asked, looking him in the face.

"Back to Mr. Dalton's—to your father's—Mrs. Winthrop."

"That dwarf gave you the order?"

"Yes, missis."

"You will drive to the next town instead, John—and do not spare the horses!"

"No use, missis."

"Why not?"

"That dwarf is an officer, and he will follow."

"But we will have the start. Obey me, John! You know that my father always bade you mind my commands!"

"As you say, missis; but it is no use."

She sprang into the vehicle, and he shut the door with a bang. Away sped the carriage, but before it had gone one hundred yards a silent and swifter steed was in hot pursuit.

The coachman looked back, and saw that it was rapidly gaining.

"The bicycle will win," he muttered, and struck the horses a sharp blow.

"Stop!" cried the voice of Kirk Hyde.

The driver heard the command, but at the same moment he saw the white, determined face of Olive Winthrop push aside the flap that separated the inner from the front side of the vehicle.

"Whip up, John! The Dalton horses must win!" she panted.

"He tells me to halt!" faltered the man.

"And I tell you to go on!"

"But if he overtakes us, it will be the worse for us both. For Lord sake, missis, what is the use?"

"You are a coward, John! I tell you to whip up!"

"I'm a doing of it for your sake, missis. Please don't——"

"Whip up!"

The command was fairly hissed into the man's ears; and he obeyed.

Again and again he applied the whip, and without mercy.

The Dalton horses were a noble pair, and never before had they felt the lash like that.

They were fairly maddened by the sudden onslaught of their usually gentle groom.

For ten minutes they kept on at that wild pace.

John had not dared to look back again.

He felt sure that their splendid spurt of speed would give them a start ahead of the pursuer.

He knew that his former mistress was in trouble, and now that he had started out in her defense his heart warmed to the work.

"If we can only reach the Dingley hill," he rapidly reflected when he saw how well the horses were doing, "we can tucker that short-legged chap. A bicycle is well enough on the right kind of a road; but when it comes to



up-hill work a pair of horses will make him sick. But I wish missis wouldn't try to run away like this."

Already they were going up a gentle slope. In a few moments what was called the Dingley hill would be reached, and then, as the driver felt sure, it would be easy to distance their pursuer.

But a sharp voice, still close in their rear, at this instant aroused him from his brief dream of triumph.

"Stop your horses, or I'll stop them for you."

With a thrill John glanced back.

The "tail-ender" of the "three H's" was less than thirty yards behind, and he was guiding his wheel with one hand while he held a revolver in the other.

"Good Lord—don't shoot the horses!" gasped the man.

"Then save 'em by stopping! And quick about it!"

John turned helplessly to see if his mistress heard the order. Her white face was at the opening, and her eyes met his.

But there was no sign of yielding in them.

"He will shoot the horses, missis! We must stop!" the man faltered.

"I say, whip up!"

"But the outfit will go to smash, if he drops one of the horses, and our own necks may be broke."

"Whip up, or I will take the whip myself."

As these words came from betwixt the compressed lips of Olive Winthrop, she reached out with one white arm, and tried to seize the reins.

But John, the driver, for once felt that he had a right to act counter to the commands of this willful young woman.

He knew that if the detective should shoot and kill one of the horses their lives would be in danger.

To save the life of his companion, therefore, he felt that he was justified in disregarding her commands.

So, instead of again urging the horses to greater efforts, he tossed the whip to the ground, and at the same time pulled the steeds down to a walk.

As he did so, however, he felt something cold pressed against his neck. The touch sent a thrill through his being such as he had never experienced before.

"I, too, have a pistol!" the voice of the young woman said. "And unless you give up the reins to me, or start the horses again, I will use it. Do you hear? And do not lose a moment of time."

John tightened the reins with a reluctant groan. But at the same moment something shot up the slope, and halted at the horses' heads.

Kirk Hyde leaped from his wheel, and seized the bits with one hand, while with the other he covered the driver with his weapon.

"Jump from the seat!" ordered the detective.

John obeyed.

"Hold these horses, and don't you dare to let them start!" was the next command.

And again the man obeyed, for there was something in these stern tones that did not brook delay.

In another instant the "tail-ender" of the "three H's" was at the side of Olive Winthrop, and his single visible eye met hers in the most invincible gaze she had ever encountered.

"Put up your pistol!" he said. And, half involuntarily, she gave the weapon up to him.

"Why were you running away from me?" he asked, in the same mild, yet firm voice, which, as it seemed to her, she must answer.

"I do not know," she returned, in a low, tremulous voice.

"You were going to meet your husband? Do not deny that!"

"Yes!"

"Then you know where he is?"

"I know where he is."

"You agreed to follow him?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not go when he did?"

"Because I did not want everybody to know that I knew where he had gone."

"He went yesterday in the afternoon?"

"At about five o'clock."

"And you did not go to bed at all last night?"

"Is there anything strange in that? Could I go to bed and sleep, knowing what had happened?"

"Probably not. But you pretended that you knew nothing about it."

"I could not very well betray my husband. No true wife would do that."

"No true wife would allow her husband to get into such trouble, if any persuasion on her part would prevent it. But there is something more in this case, and we will leave to you to explain it. You admit that you did not retire to bed last night. Will you tell me where you were at midnight, and after that hour until two o'clock in the morning?"

A flash of red dotted her white cheeks and her eyes fell.

"No, I will not tell you! It is none of your business!"

"Perhaps not," grinned the dwarf. "But I know, just the same. You were at the bank. You went there to get what cash your husband told you was in the vault, and which he wasn't nerry enough to take himself! Needn't deny it, madam, for I know!"

Olive Winthrop drew a short, quick breath, but did not speak. There was no telling how much or how little the keen man knew.

He might be making mere conjectures, and striving to lead her into making admissions.

She resolved to hold her peace, and let him find out what he could by any other means he had at his command.

"I have gone too far to weaken now," she thought. "And he does not know that I have the money now. Perhaps I can hold on to that, and in time I may rejoin my husband."

His sharp eye seemed to be looking into her very soul.

"I must not event think," was what flashed through her brain. "For I believe he reads my thoughts. I will remain like a sphinx."

"But while you were hiding in the bank, and awaiting your chance," the "tail-ender" went on, "you met with a little surprise. Somebody else was there on a similar errand. Am I right?"

She hesitated. But in the suggestion she felt that there might be an avenue for escape. By some means the detective knew that Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker, meant to rob the bank, and he also suspected that she was there and saw the famous burglar.

"But he does not know which of us has the money," was her thought. "And he shall never know. I will baffle him in that."



## CHAPTER XII.

## THE "SANDWICH" ON DECK.

Quimby Hall, the "sandwich" of the "three H's," was not taken wholly by surprise.

The two ruffians, who flung themselves upon him, were both powerful men, and much heavier than himself. One had a sand-bag, and the other brass knuckles, and being thus equipped in genuine thug style, it was no wonder that they thought themselves sure of their man.

But they counted upon giving him a complete surprise. In this they were so thoroughly mistaken that the surprise was visited wholly upon themselves.

The man with the brass knuckles aimed a deadly blow at the detective's face. But the face was not there when the blow arrived, and in consequence the assailant was thrown against the door by his own momentum.

The other assailant swung his sand-bag aloft simultaneously, and brought it down with terrific force.

But the agility of Quimby Hall eluded that also, and the unexpected forward movement of the first ruffian brought the latter into nearly the same position as that originally occupied by the detective.

As a result, the one with the brass knuckles received the partially spent force of the sand-bag on his own right arm, bringing to his lips a yell of rage and pain.

Thus resulted the first attack of the two ruffians, partially disabling one, and placing both at a temporary disadvantage.

Quimby Hall was not the man to miss the opportunity thus gained.

A lightning like blow from his left hand stretched the man with the brass knuckles upon the floor, effectually putting him *hors de combat*. And before the other could gather himself for another blow with the sand-bag, he found himself looking into Quimby's revolver.

"Think twice before you strike!" warned the "sandwich" of the "three H's," as he met the threatening gaze and attitude of the sand-bagger with his unflinching eyes.

"Drop the bag!" he added, as the other seemed determined to face him out without yielding.

And the brutal implement fell with a thud upon the floor.

"You tackled the wrong innocent that time, as it were!" Quimby continued, reaching back and locking the door to make sure that no reinforcements should steal in upon him from the rear.

"It was all a joke, boss! We wouldn't really have hit ye! We are a rough set here, and we plays rousin' jokes, but we don't knock out any men! So put up yer gun! It's all right, boss, and don't yer forgit it!"

"Yes, my daisy, it's all right, and you may gamble on it," drawled Quimby.

"Then put up yer gun, won't yer?"

"In just a moment, my daisy, only don't get impatient about it, for I won't shoot unless you try some shenannigans, in which case I'll agree to shoot quick and straight. Just put out your flippers, and be lively about it."

Quimby held a pair of steel bracelets ready to put them on the wrists of the ruffian.

The latter hesitated. There was a treacherous gleam in his snaky eyes, and the detective knew that it would be dangerous to turn his back upon him for an instant.

Besides, it was more than likely that there were others within calling distance, who would be prompt to respond to a signal from either of the thugs.

The more quickly this work was done, the detective was sure, the more effectual it would be in the end.

"Put out your hands, and let me put the bracelets on."

The order was uttered more sharply this time, and the tough could see that the hand of the other clutched the revolver more tightly while his forefinger lightly pressed the trigger.

Out came the reluctant hands. At the same time the owner of them cast a backward glance at his comrade, who still lay upon the floor where he had fallen under the swift blow of Quimby Hall.

"Goin' to pull me in? Lord!—but what have I done to have them things put on me—hey? Can't ye stand a bit of a joke from a couple of young chaps as has been takin' a sup of somep'n as makes 'em feel uncommon good?"

Click!—went the handcuffs on the wrists of the thug.

"I'm just returning the joke, in my own way, my daisy!" smiled Quimby, as he bent over the other ruffian to perform the same office for him.

"Be ye goin' to pull us in?"

"That depends."

And the blue eyes of the "sandwich" of "three H's" again met the shrinking gaze of the sand-bagger.

"Ye think we've been doing somep'n out the way?"

"I think you meant to lay me out in regular shape!"

"But I'm telling of ye, that was only a bit of fun!"

"You meant to kill me!" persisted Quimby Hall, in an invincible tone. "But you tackled the wrong chicken. Now, you are pining for a show at begging off. Let me tell you, I think I can fetch both of you to electrocution! You are a pair of thugs of the worst sort, and your business is killing!"

"Lord bless ye—you're too hard on us! Why, I ain't but nineteen, and Jimmy there is only twenty."

"You've got to do some talking, if you want me to let up on you. Mind, I'm not going to promise anything. But I'll merely give you a chance to win a bit of mercy. My heart is as hard as flint, so you will have to come down pretty mellow, if you would make an impression on it."

Quimby had begun in a bantering tone; but now he became almost fierce in his earnestness.

He did not expect to get a great deal of truth out of these ruffians; yet he knew that they would be willing to come to almost any terms rather than stand trial upon the serious charge which he could bring against them.

"What can we do, boss? We're willin' to be fair wid ye, if only ye'll let this little scrap go for a joke. Fun is fun, boss, and we never thought we'd be havin' a fly-cop onto us for it."

"There is just one thing you can do which will make me consider your case before turning you into the station."

"And what be that, boss?"

"You can tell me why you made this attempt to lay me out?"

"It was a joke, boss——"

"Hold on!" the "sandwich" broke in. And the other paused.

"I want the truth, without any adornments. Who hired you to lay me out? You wouldn't have taken the risk for nothing, and I know you could have had no personal grudge."

"Would it be easier for us, if I told ye who put up the game on ye?"

"It will be harder for you if you den't tell. It may not go very easy with you in any case."



"Well, it isn't for us to lose our necks for the work of some other bloke."

"Who hired you?"

"It wasn't a man at all. It was a girl as did the hirin'!"  
Quimby's head swam.

Was he once more in his career to be betrayed by a beautiful girl? Had he such unerring power to read the characters of criminals of his own sex, and yet was he forever to be hoodwinked by beauty and seeming innocence in the other?

"A woman hired you, then?" he asked, his voice husky in spite of himself.

"Yes, and she's a beauty, too."

"Her name?"

"Must ye have that?"

"I must!"

"It ought to be enough, if I tell ye that she's the one that ye come here to see."

"Lena Jepworth?"

"Lena Jepworth."

Quimby felt certain that this would be the answer when it came. Yet the shock was hardly less keen than it would have been if it were wholly a surprise.

Under a sudden sweep of feeling, he turned upon the ruffian who stood so imperturbably, with his manacled hands and snaky orbs.

"Tell me!" he cried, seizing the man fiercely by the shoulder, "what is Lena Jepworth to Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker? Mind, I want the truth!"

The man grinned in his repulsive way.

"Pears to me you take a mighty deep interest in Lena Jepworth," he returned.

"That is not an answer to my question."

"Well, boss, you'll have to ask the girl herself, for I don't know what they be to each other. But I'm mighty sure that she stands up for him as strong as she could, if she was his wife."

Quimby was prepared for this answer. He realized that what was a matter of such vital moment to him was something which these ruffians had probably thought little about.

If Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker, should have a young and beautiful wife, what mattered that to the ordinary crooks who might be for a time connected with him?

He hastily made up his mind what to do next; and he lost no time in carrying his resolves into execution.

"I'm not going to pull you in this time; I'll give you one more chance to knock me over first," he declared. "And in return I want you to enlighten me on one more point that will help me and do you no harm. Is there more than one Jules Jepworth?"

"I reckon there is more than one that calls himself that," was the reply.

"And is one of them a crazy crank?"

"Should say he was."

"What is he to the other?"

"I don't know."

Quimby had already unlocked the door. He now went out, closed and locked it after him, and descended to the street, leaving the ruffians to regain their liberty as they might.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### WHAT THE "TAIL-ENDER" OVERHEARD.

An hour after the successful pursuit of the Dalton carriage by Kirk Hyde, the "tail-ender" of the "three H's," the entire outfit returned to the residence of the bank president.

Olive Winthrop, pale yet resolute, entered her father's dwelling, followed by the detective.

The latter had induced her to disclose nothing concerning her meeting with the safe-breaker in the bank upon the previous night, nor aught of the strange compact which the reader knows was there entered into.

Satisfied that other measures than physical fear would be more successful in unsealing the woman's lips, if he were only patient, the dwarf-detective bade her good-night at the door, and then repaired to the railway station, where he was confident that Tad Silsby was waiting for him.

But before going to the station, he privately instructed John, the coachman, to see that Olive Winthrop did not again attempt flight that night.

She had, indeed, promised the detective that she would not do so. But he deemed it safest to have something more than her pledge to depend upon.

He found the station nearly deserted.

A night operator was dozing in the telegraph office; but the waiting-rooms were deserted.

Inquiry disclosed the fact that a youth answering to Tad Silsby's description had arrived on an earlier train, and that he had remained in the waiting-room until the station agent inquired his business, when he abruptly left.

Not doubting but he would meet the powerful youth outside in the vicinity, the detective went out to look him up.

The station was located a little off the central part of the city, and a short walk in the rear of the building brought Kirk Hyde to the edge of a natural grove of oak and chestnut trees.

A new street skirted the grove, and laborers had here and there begun the work of clearing off the trees, while several building-lots were staked off, and it was evidently a section of the town which was being opened up for speculative purposes.

Half a dozen shanties, from which crooked pieces of stove-pipe protruded in lieu of chimneys, proclaimed that the Italian laborers used them for lodgings.

The "tail-ender" of the "three H's" was a little curious as to the cause of Tad's disappearance.

He did not dream in the beginning that the youth would venture to leave the immediate vicinity of the station without first keeping his appointment.

But it was certain that the youth had gone some distance from the locality, for even a low whistle from the detective failed to induce him to show himself.

Hence it seemed likely that he would go in the direction of the laborers' shanties, rather than run the risk of showing himself on the street contrary to Kirk's instructions.

Kirk Hyde had work for Tad Silsby to do. He wished to go to New York and consult with Rexford Hunt; and during his absence he must make sure that the movements of Olive Winthrop be watched constantly.

"Silsby will be faithful, and what is more, he is a hard boy to bluff," thought the detective.

But there was no sign of the youth near the shanties;



and impatient at the delay, Hyde at last knocked upon the rough door of one of the rude structures.

He beheld a gleam of light from within before knocking; but the instant his summons sounded the light was extinguished.

He repeated the knock, believing that the men within were playing cards, and perhaps enjoying a forbidden bottle of liquor, which they feared might be confiscated by the police.

But no response to his summons came; and the detective paused to consider the advisability of forcing an entrance, when he was startled by the sound of footsteps in his rear.

Turning quickly, he found himself confronted by Silsby himself.

"Thought I'd given ye the slip?" the youth asked, in a cautious key.

"Yes. But what are you doing here?"

"Got tired of hangin' round where I wa'n't wanted, and thought I'd come out here and see what sort of a shanty-town they was buildin' up," replied Tad, in a tone that he made a strong attempt to make a careless one.

The "tail-ender" of the "three H's" gave him a single swift glance, which, even in the gloom, discovered more than he youth even dreamed that his countenance was capable of betraying.

"Well, have you seen enough of this quarter by starlight so that you can go to work?" Hyde asked, averting his face so that the other should not divine that he suspected anything.

"Reckon I'm ready for most anything you can scare up, rather than hangin' round waitin till doomsday."

"I was late, I know. But we can't figure time down to a dot beforehand, and I had more to occupy my time than I expected. I want you to watch a certain house till to-morrow afternoon. I'm going to New York on the next train, which leaves at four o'clock. Can you stick to the job?"

"I reckon I can stick, if you'll show me the house, and tell me what to do."

Hyde briefly and rapidly gave the required instructions, at the same time conducting the youth to the street upon which the Dalton house was situated.

Here they separated, the detective promising to return by two o'clock the following afternoon.

Hyde went first to a hotel for a few hours' sleep; but at a little after four in the morning he was out again and wending his way toward the Dalton house instead of to the station.

"As I expected," he exclaimed, after a reconnoissance of the locality revealed the fact that Tad Silsby had deserted his post already.

Swiftly, yet silently, he made his way back to the vicinity of the Italian huts.

The one which he had before approached was again dimly lighted within, for morning was only beginning to dawn in the east.

There were as yet no signs of life about the other huts, and it was probable that the inmates would not be generally astir for fully an hour.

The hut to which the attention of the detective was directed was one of the largest, and there were about it more signs of rude comfort than the others displayed.

On the side opposite the door there was a small window consisting of a single "seven-by-nine" light of glass.

Hyde also noted that underneath the window, on the

outside, several heavy planks were placed on the ground, making a sort of rude, uncovered platform.

Without stopping, then, to figure out the probable purpose of this platform, the "tail-ender" of the "three H's" stepped noiselessly upon the planks, and pressed his ear against a crevice in the walls of the hut.

At first he could hear nothing; but after a moment of patient listening he heard the growl of a masculine voice which he instantly recognized.

The speaker was Tad Silsby.

"I don't like to do it!" he was saying, with his nasal drawl. "I ain't no saint, and I'd like to be rich as Vanderbilt and them chaps, but I'll be ding-dashed if I want to play a double game like the one you're askin' of me."

"Then what are you here for?" demanded another voice, which was crisp and clear like the ring of steel.

"I dunno. You told me that you had a snap that would make me rich, and that the detective chaps would never give me any more than day-wages for anything they wanted me to do. I'm poor as dirt, and always have been poor. My dad was poor afore me, and I hain't even got a relation in the world that ain't as poor as I be, and most of 'em lazy. Gosh-mighty! Why don't it happen that somethin' good should happen to me? Why in old Nick don't somebody die, and leave me a fortune?"

The other seemed to listen with remarkable patience to this plaint of the country youth, who, with all his great strength, had never been able to turn it to account for anything more than the poorest pay for the hardest work.

"That's it," returned the steel-like voice. "And you are always dead sure to be just as poor as you are now, unless you catch onto new ideas. It's bad enough to die poor when you can't help it; but worse to know that you have flung away a chance to be rich. I thought you had more sand, else I would never have sought this interview. You're a sheep-head—a candidate for some almshouse—and no matter how honest you may be all your life, you will be despised more than I shall, and just because you are poor."

The taunt was well put.

Tad Silsby quickly retorted.

"If ye'll fight fair, I'll lick ye for callin' me a sheep-head."

"You might whip a dozen like me, and still they would call you a sheep-head after you were dead, just for dying poor."

And the speaker indulged a low, taunting laugh.

"Darn it all! how much cash will ye give?" Tad demanded.

"That's business. Now, we may come at something. You want to be rich. Now, what do you call a comfortable fortune?"

The other hesitated. Doubtless a great many fabulous figures flitted through his brain—figures too fabulous for him even to utter.

At last he said:

"Ten thousand dollars would support me for life—jest the interest on it at six per cent. I never had more'n twelve dollars a month and board. I know ye won't give me so much as that, but ye axed me for figgers, and I'll give 'em at that."

"Earn the money and you shall have it, and two thousand to boot as a bonus," exclaimed the steel-like voice.

"Twelve thousand dollars!" gasped Tad Silsby.

"Twelve thousand dollars, and you won't ever be called a sheep-head again as long as you live."



"Shall I have it in cash?"

"In clean cash, and the notes will be on almost any bank you may name, for Jules Jepworth does business with all the best banks in the country, and every one of them honors his drafts when he presents them."

Again the speaker laughed, in his peculiar, exultant way, which one would never forget, if it were once heard.

"Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker, and within two yards of the hand of the tail-ender of the three H's."

Such was the startling realization which swept through the brain of the listener. And he unconsciously laid one hand on a weapon, while his single eye gleamed with desperate resolve.

"But I must keep my head cool and my hand steady," was his next thought. "For Jules Jepworth is too desperate and wily a foe to encounter in an even fight. The three H's are all on deck, and the tail-ender mustn't spoil their plans by taking them out of pickle too soon."

Even as these thoughts passed through the mind of the detective, he became conscious of a startling fact.

The plank upon which he stood had settled several inches, and at this moment it suddenly sank beneath his feet.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### A BLOW IN THE DARK.

"I have thrown away valuable time, and gotten a new heart-ache into the bargain!" was the burden of Quimby Hall's reflections as he went to his lodgings, and tried to compose himself for a night's sleep.

With his thoroughly trained will, the young detective succeeded in banishing the unpleasant sting brought by his unpleasant discoveries concerning the young woman whose sweetly innocent face had appealed so strongly to his sympathies and confidence.

A night's sleep, as usual, made his brain clearer, and during the next day he was able to plan and execute much efficient work upon the case which the "three H's" had just undertaken.

Another night passed, and in good season the "sandwich" of the firm held a consultation with the "head-light" of the famous three.

But for the first time since they had worked together Rexford Hunt failed to give explicit advice to the younger man, or to state what theories or plans he had himself resolved to act upon.

Their consultation was lengthy, as we have stated; but when Quimby went out upon the street he felt that it was wholly unsatisfactory.

"He intimated that something of importance had occurred since I saw him last, but he did not explain what," mused Quimby, as he returned to the street.

"And that isn't all, for he seemed almost indifferent to what I had to say to him. And when I asked him what I had better do next, he went off into a vague and general sort of yarn that never gave me so much as a hint as to his real views. I would give a pretty penny if I knew what has come over the head-light of the three H's!"

While musing thus, and with his mind growing more and more disturbed over the singular behavior of the man upon whom he depended at all times to help him over knotty points, Quimby Hall took an L train for a section of the city just below Harlem.

The quiet work which he had been doing upon the case had disclosed the fact that Jules Jepworth, of the safe-breakers' gang had more than one place within the city limits which he used as a place of rendezvous.

One, he was satisfied, was with the fair Lena in the Bowery; another, which he had not lately visited, owing to the locality having been made especially warm by the police, was in West Fifty-fifth street; while a third was in the locality which Quimby Hall was now about to visit.

As he approached a dingy building which stood between two vacant lots, he saw that a shade on the inner side of one of the windows was suddenly pulled down, as though the person within had seen him coming and wished to avoid being seen by him.

This trivial circumstance was sufficient to excite the suspicions of the young detective.

He walked past the house without looking at it, and kept on to another street, into which he turned.

Then he made his way back to the suspected building by a short detour which brought him to it from the rear.

Thus Quimby suddenly presented himself in front of the building, and directly before the window where he had noticed the suspected attempt to avoid observation.

As he expected, the curtain had been raised, and his alert glance detected a face peering furtively out.

This time the face dodged back, and no attempt to lower the curtain was made.

"That is the one who tried to sand-bag me!" was the verdict of the "sandwich," as he again walked past the dwelling.

It was not the purpose of Quimby to enter the place then. He did not think Jules Jepworth was hiding there at that time. And the presence of the ruffian of whom he had once got the better in his treacherous attempt, was sufficient to show that this was still a rendezvous for the followers and pals of Jules Jepworth.

"The leader keeps out of sight, but he is playing a new and deep game, with the object of wiping out the three H's!"

Such was the conclusion of Quimby Hall as he ran over in his mind the events of the last few days.

"Each of these places must be kept under constant surveillance," was his instant decision. "And to accomplish this end I must have trusty help. That is the next point to claim my attention."

He made his way to the nearest police station, and the moment he entered the officer in charge beckoned him within the rail.

"I never saw you before," said the sergeant, with an approving glance at the young man. "But the papers printed a picture of you the other day, and I know ye by that. You're the chap they call the sandwich of the three H's, eh?"

"Yes—but be sly about it," was the reply.

"Nothing green about us, if we do belong to the regular force," said the sergeant, while his eyes twinkled.

"I'm ready to gamble on that, sergeant. But what is in the wind? Have the crooks beaten you so bad that you want the three H's to help you a little on the sly?"

"Not that, my boy—the regulars ain't all asleep yet. But ye see it comes handy for you fellows to have a station-house open here and there, just as an accommodation, now and then. Here's the message for ye—it come about an hour ago, and I thought you'd be coming for it before now!"

As he spoke the good-humored officer took a telegram from his desk and gave it to Quimby.

To the astonishment of the latter the message envelope was directed correctly to himself, and to this police station, showing that the sender expected him to receive it here more promptly than if it were sent to the office of Hunt, Hall & Hyde.

How did the sender know that he was to visit this police station at this particular hour?

Quimby had not disclosed his intentions even to Rex Hunt.

"Somebody knows what is in my mind mighty near as well as I know myself!" was his reflection, as he opened the envelope.

The sergeant eyed him as he read it, and saw the flush of eagerness that mantled the young man's blonde cheeks.

"Bad look is it, or good?" inquired the officer.

"Another safe broken into, and cleaned out, right in broad daylight!" answered Quimby Hall.

"And where is it? And the work of that Jules Jepworth, bad luck to him?"

"We don't know. This telegram is from Rexford Hunt, one of my partners, and it calls me to the scene of the burglary, to meet him on the spot. It breaks up my plans for the day, but it can't be helped. The odd part of it is, that Rex should know where to send this message so that it would reach me so straight when I hardly knew myself that I should call here when I saw him last this morning."

"It looks as if the head-light could see a good ways like the papers say he can," smiled the sergeant.



And Quimby had to acknowledge to himself that his senior displayed a superior capability for finding out his plans.

"You say this telegram came an hour ago?" the young man asked.

"About that, I should say."

"Who delivered it?"

"A regular telegraph boy, to be sure."

"And did you tell him that I wasn't here?"

"Of course; and he said that it was directed here, and it was for him to deliver whether you was here or not. And of course, thinks I, if the sender made a blunder it ain't none of my funeral, nor the b'y's, for that matter. So I tuck the message and put it in a pigeon-hole, thinking that it was sent here by your orders and that you'd call for it if I only give ye time enough. And begorra so ye did!"

The sergeant was a new man but keen as a trap, and although he was not born on the American side of the water he had worked himself up on the force as many others have done, from the bottom of the ladder.

But he had a trifle of his national brogue yet, and a full share of his national wit.

"It is all straight, of course," said Quimby. "And I can do nothing except obey orders. But I want your help. There is a coop on your street here that I want watched for a day or two. I don't want any demonstration made—only to have the place watched, and a record of those who come and go carefully kept. Will you see that it is done?"

"That I will, sir."

"And I need not enjoin secrecy upon you. You know that that is essential in our business at all times."

"Ivery time, sir."

"Good! Then I will go, and you may be sure you will see me again within a day or two unless you see a report in the papers that the crooks have got the better of me!"

Quimby Hall, the "sandwich" of the "three H's," little dreamed that his bantering speech was to prove almost prophetic in the outcome.

Yet such was to be the case.

In an hour he was a passenger on a train just pulling out from the Grand Central station; and while he cast a sweeping glance over the double row of fellow-passengers, a slouching form on one of the short rear seats pulled his hat down over his eyes and settled himself, apparently for a protracted sleep.

Quimby did not give this person a second glance. And during the hours' ride which was taken it did not occur to the detective to look back at the sleepy stranger to see whether he still remained at his post or not.

The afternoon was waning into twilight as the "sandwich" of the "three H's" alighted at the station where the telegram declared that the latest audacity of the safe-breakers' gang had been enacted.

The stranger with the slouch hat alighted at the same time, but upon the opposite side of the car.

The town was not a large one, and the station was a little off from the most thickly settled part of the village.

The telegram from Rexford Hunt had stated that the safe in the office of a manufacturing establishment had been opened and robbed of its contents a few hours before, and in broad day.

It was a regular pay-day of the manufactory, and several thousand dollars in cash were deposited in the office safe.

So much, in brief terms, had been stated by the telegram.

Of course Quimby Hall had no other knowledge concerning the affairs except that he had been in the town several times before and knew the exact location of the manufactory.

Without speaking to any one, he now bent his steps toward the factory buildings, which stood a little below the depot, and in a hollow through which a small stream made its way.

Lights twinkled from the windows of the factory as he approached it, and he could hear the hum of machinery.

The office was in a separate building, at a little distance from the mills; and near it was a long, low building used for the storage of stock.

As Quimby drew near the last-mentioned building he saw a familiar figure cross his path and enter at the open door of the stock-shed.

"Rexford Hunt, by all that's mighty!" Quimby exclaimed.

His first impulse was to accost his partner. But he decided to follow him in silence instead.

Within a light dimly glimmered. The detective entered without hesitation, since Rexford had preceded him.

But at the threshold he was stricken down by a swift, silent blow that stretched him insensible upon the floor.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A TERRIBLE SITUATION.

The dwarf detective, otherwise known as the "tail-ender" of the "three H's," was face to face with the most terrible and unexpected peril of his whole career.

So quickly did the plank upon which he had been standing sink beneath his weight that he had no time to avoid the catastrophe to himself.

He fought desperately at the sides of the opening; but they were only walls of earth which crumbled in his grasp.

Down, down he descended with terrific velocity, and to a depth which, to his overwrought imagination seemed stupendous.

The plank upon which he was standing descended with him, and in his fall he received a dizzying blow upon the head from it.

But, although he was for the moment too dazed to take in his situation with anything like coherence, yet his indomitable will was in no wise crushed, even for the moment.

While intense pain shot through every tiber of his being, and countless stars seemed to dance before his vision, he impetuously flung off the plank which rested across his limbs, and sprang to his feet.

But it was only to fall again, for he found the bottom of the pit into which he had fallen was paved with round stones, and that the latter were covered with stagnant water to a depth of two or three inches.

But the second fall caused some of the cool water to splash up into his face, and this, soothing the intense pain of the wound upon his head, served at the same time to restore somewhat of his natural good judgment and prudence.

Rising more cautiously next time, he glanced upward to see how far he had really fallen.

The gray sky looked upon him through the jagged opening from which the plank had been dislodged. It was fully fifteen feet above; and it seemed that he had fallen into what might originally have been intended for a well, but which for some reason had been dug no deeper.

As he stood thus, trying to think of some manner of regaining his liberty from the unwholesome prison into which he had been precipitated, a huge fragment of the wall of the pit suddenly gave way and fell to the bottom.

Kirk Hyde shrank back as the mass of earth descended, and barely in time to save himself from being thrown down a third time by its weight.

The air was filled with dust, and for a time it seemed as though he were to succumb to the danger of suffocation.

But as only the surface-earth that had fallen was dry, the dust soon settled, and he opened his eyes and ventured to breathe again.

In the meantime he wondered if Tad Silsby and Jules Jepworth within the hut were not aware of what had befallen the pit.

Even as he thought of this he beheld a dark shadow appear above the opening, and saw a face peering down into the gloom of the pit.

"They can't see me in this darkness, so much is sure!" was the thought of the detective. And he stood still and awaited developments.

He could not tell at first whether the face looking down was that of the youth or of the safe-breaker.

But a movement of the looker's head soon revealed that it was Tad. And the next instant the face disappeared, and the deep, stern voice of Jules Jepworth said, loud enough for the detective to distinctly hear:



"Well, what do you see?"

"Nothin' but the darndest, blackest hole that I ever tried to look inter," was the reply.

"There must be something there, whether you can see it or not."

"Why don't ye look for yerself, if ye think my eyes are so blasted dull!"

"Look again, and keep looking till your eyes become accustomed to the gloom. We just came from where there was a light, and your eyes haven't got used to the change."

Again the big, round face of Tad Silsby appeared at the opening, and this time it remained for fully two minutes.

Then it was withdrawn.

"Can't see a thing," he declared.

"Did you hear anything?"

"Nary a thing."

"The whole of the plank fell in, and that wouldn't have happened unless something disturbed it. I arranged it so that it would prove a trap to any would-be eavesdroppers, and the fact that the trap was sprung is sufficient to prove that I have caught some game in it."

"It might be a dog run across it," suggested Tad, in whose tones there was a nervous tremor which showed that he was getting deeper into the affair than he fully relished.

"No, it wasn't!" was the sharp reply.

"How d'ye know?"

"Look here!—and here—and see the tracks!"

Tad was silent, and the invincible tones of the desperado continued:

"I tell you some fool was trying to spy upon us, and if he got a look into the cabin he knows that Tad Silsby, the young game-cock who is ambitious to be a champion fighter or a king of the Lazy Gang, is having a private confab with one whom the detectives and police of the whole country would give a year of their lives for the glory of catching. How does that strike you, young man?"

"Do—do you really think a detective was spying on us?"

"I know it!"

"Good land!—then I'm lost! He'll be for tellin' that dwarf detective that I promised to stand by, and I reckon he'll put a bullet through my head the first chance he gets!"

"Simpleton!" rasped the bitter voice of the safe-breaker. "How do you think that a man at the bottom of that pit can give you away, or harm you in any manner, until he gets out? And besides, perhaps the fall broke his neck! If it did it may be the best thing that could happen to him, for a man who follows the trail of Jules Jepworth, when that trail is too warm, is walking on a bridge of glass!"

"Maybe his neck was broke!" remarked Tad, while a gleam of dismal hope begun to steady his nerves.

"But if he lives, and there is a good chance, at least, that he wasn't lucky enough to be killed, we have him in a trap which we're not obliged to let him out of till he gives a pledge to act on the square after he is out. But we have no time for idle discussion. The light of day will soon be here, and then you and I will not care to be seen too much by the sons of men. Yonder is a dry fagot; here are matches. Fetch me the stick, and we'll soon know what lies at the bottom of that hole!"

Kirk Hyde, "tail-ender" of the "three H's," heard distinctly every word that had passed between the safe-breaker and his weak-minded tool.

The concluding suggestion of Jepworth aroused Hyde to a keener sense of the perilous situation in which ill-fortune had placed him, just when a greater success had seemed to be within his grasp.

"He is going to light the fagot and toss it down there to see who sprung his trap!" was the realization that flashed through the mind of the detective.

For a moment he thought with a swiftness and intensity such as only the direst straits can make the human brain capable of.

"It is man to man—wit against wit!" he thought.

Bending quickly, he scooped a quantity of the caved-in earth into a heap, using his hands, and working with a rapidity that soon accomplished his purpose.

Then he flung himself down upon the earth, with his face downward, and his limbs drawn up as though in the contortions of death.

In this posture he remained during the suspenseful moments that ensued, without stirring a muscle.

He had not long to wait.

"The torch is ready," announced the safe-breaker. "Now toss it to the bottom of the pit, and use your eyes to good purpose while the flame lights up the place. Then report to me what you see."

"Why in blazes don't you look for yourself——" Tad began, but Jepworth cut him short.

"Because I'm giving the orders and you are obeying them. Do you see the point? Come!—toss the torch down into the pit, and if the idiot at the bottom has any life in him, and is not shamming he will let us know he is there if the blaze singes his hair!"

Tad hesitated no longer. Despite his great physical strength, and his frequent boasts that he would never take orders from any man, he realized that he was at this moment as completely under the thumb of this invincible desperado as he could have been if he were the man's slave.

Kirk Hyde, of the "three H's," in the meantime breathlessly awaited the outcome of the safe-breaker's scheme for bringing him to terms.

He heard the swish of the flaming torch as it was tossed downward; and he could see the dull-red glare as it fell upon the heap of earth within a foot of his face; he could even feel the heat and smell the smoke from the burning fagot.

"A close call!" was his thought. "For if it had hit my head, or even lodged upon my back, I could hardly have had the nerve to lie still and let it cook me by inches!"

"There's somebody down there!" cried Tad, in a shrill whisper.

"I supposed there was," Jepworth coolly returned.

"But I guess his neck is broke! He's curled up as if it was."

"Light me another fagot and we'll soon see whether he is shamming or not!" ordered the safe-breaker. And in that order Kirk Hyde felt that his doom was sealed. At the same time he felt that the fierce gaze of Jules Jepworth was fixed upon him!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### MORE EXPERIENCE FOR THE "SANDWICH."

Quimby Hall did not lack shrewdness; and surely he was not deficient in courage. But he possessed one human weakness, else he would have been more than a human character, which it is not my design to depict.

He was sometimes too headlong in his pursuit of a foe.

From the moment of receiving the telegram purporting to be from Rexford Hunt, there had been vague misgivings as to its genuineness in his mind.

When he approached the mill, and saw there no signs of anything unusual having occurred, his suspicion of fraud became stronger; yet, the moment that he saw Rex Hunt entering the stock-shed, he did not pause to consider whether even this might not be some cleverly concocted scheme to hoodwink him.

The blow that felled him upon the threshold of the building was a deadly one, and had it struck him fairly where it was aimed it might have ended his career entirely.

As it was, for a brief period he lost consciousness wholly; and when he was aroused it was by the murmur of low, gruff voices.

His wits were not slow to act, even though his head still spun dizzily under the thump it had received.

He had been genuinely unconscious; and now he feigned a continuation of the same condition, although every sense was keenly alert.

"A clean sweep!" he heard one of the voices declare.

"Yes, a clean sweep, and if only Jules himself has done his part of the work as well as we have done ours, we'll have mighty little more to fear from the three H's."

"They were all on deck twenty-four hours ago," the other resumed; "but now every mother's son of them are down in the hold, as it were."



"Providing that Jules has done his part," the second speaker added.

"It is a pity that he didn't give us orders to finish 'em up for good, Ham!" said the first, in his hoarse growl.

"Jules is deep, and ye can't get the best of him at carrying out a safe-breaking scheme; that you can't deny, Jimmy. But when it comes to dealing with the fly-cops, you and me would dispose of 'em for good when he would only try to intimidate or bribe 'em. Why, I s'pose he has more cops in his hire, round in different cities and towns, that we've any idea of. That's how he goes round and breaks into the safes and bank-vaults right in the teeth of the cops, and when there are dispatches sent ahead to tell 'em to look out for him."

Ham, as the second speaker was called, spoke admiringly. And, as it is needless to add, he stated what Quimby Hall set down mentally as one of the most important points which the three detectives had yet obtained.

If members of the local police force in various cities and towns were in reality in the hire of Jules Jepworth, or secretly in fear of his vengeance, then it was no wonder that he went and came unscathed when, supposably, the greatest precautions had been taken for his capture.

"Why is he so particular about never having a man put out of the way for good?" the ruffian called Jimmy inquired.

"He is cranky on that point."

"Afraid that there'll be a general rush to catch him?"

"No. He is afraid of nothing. I've heard him say that he wouldn't run for all the cops in New York, so far as being afraid of the penalty the law could inflict on him. But he is that proud of his record for always beating the cops, and never failing to carry out a plan that he makes, that he would sell his life dear rather than get inside of prison walls. Oh, Jules is a queer customer, and that is all there is to it! The common sort of toughs can't ever get onto his ways, and he is jest as much an aristocrat in his line as Vanderbilt is in the railroad business."

"Well," said Ham, after a pause, "we have one of the sharpest of the fly-cops here, and we have got to do something with him. What shall it be?"

"Keep him safe till we hear from Jules."

"And in the meanwhile the cops will be hunting for him, and after us thick as flies. Lucky for us if they don't find him, and get us in limbo within a week."

"Within a week!" echoed the other, with a laugh.

"Yes, and likely less time than that."

"Well, I rather think we shall have the cops around in less time than that, if nothing more is done. But you may bet your life that Jules Jepworth ain't the man to wait a whole week for things to take their course. Why, he will tell us what to do, and it will be done within twenty-four hours."

"Then we're only to provide for the safe-keeping of our game for a few hours?"

"That is all."

As the reader may be assured, Quimby Hall was an interested listener to every word uttered by these two men.

It was clear for one thing that they were both trusted followers of the chief of the safe-breakers' gang.

Without a doubt, they were adepts themselves in the science of blowing open safes, and in the use of the jimmy, the punch-drill, or the sledge-hammer, to say nothing of the various novel and ingenious tools for safe-breaking invented by Jules Jepworth himself.

The "sandwich" of the "three H's" felt that it was almost an honor, even, to be captured by such famous and expert gentry in the lawless art.

"But they may find out that they have caught a Tartar, as it were," was the silent reflection of the prisoner.

The latter had not ventured to stir, and he began to feel the intense discomfort of maintaining one position for such a protracted period, to say nothing of the necessity of keeping his eyes tightly closed when he could see light shining upon their lids, and knew that a peep through the lashes would reveal to him the faces of his captors.

Venturing to move his hands slightly, he for the first time found that they were fettered with handcuffs. This discovery aroused him also to a consciousness of unusual weight resting upon his ankles, and he concluded that they also were manacled.

"They've got me, sure!" he thought. And realizing that he was wholly at their mercy it rendered him yet more anxious to maintain the appearance of unconsciousness until it should be prudent to awaken.

But he was not to be permitted to choose his own time in this matter.

He heard one of the men approach him, and the next moment he felt the toe of a heavy boot thumping his ribs in a manner which was in no wise marked by gentleness.

Quimby stirred and groaned in response to this attempt, as he felt bound to do upon more than one consideration.

Causing his eyelids to quiver, and, attempting to draw up his limbs, he feigned a slow return to consciousness.

"Wake up, my daisy!" ordered the gruff tones of Jimmy, while the heavy boot emphasized the command by a stronger kick.

"You—you'll break my ribs!" muttered Quimby, slowly opening his eyes.

To his surprise, the face that looked down into his was half-hidden by a mask. The eyes gleamed exultantly; the chin, which was visible, was broad and heavy, with a dark, stubbly beard.

Glancing past this man who stood over him, the detective saw another leaning against the stone wall of the place. He was taller than Jimmy, and stoop-shouldered, while his eyes were duller, and his chin smooth-shaven.

He also wore a half-mask.

Both had the general air of highwaymen, with their top-boots and belts, with revolvers stuck conspicuously in the latter.

"You've snoozed long enough, just for the love-tap that I gave you," said Jimmy, decisively.

Quimby tried to sit erect; but with his limbs hampered he found it impossible to do so, especially since his head seemed to spin under the effort.

"Better lie still and keep calm," suggested Ham, who also advanced to take a better survey of their prize, as though it were some curious animal which they had caught.

"Perhaps your advice is good, since I can't do otherwise," Quimby coolly retorted.

"One thing you are to set your mind at rest upon," said Jimmy, while he allowed one hand to rest carelessly upon his revolver. "There isn't the slightest use in your thinking of getting away, or of making a noise that will bring friends to help you. There is no one near enough to hear who would lift a hand to pull you out of the tangle that you have tumbled into."

"I don't count on any outside help," said Quimby.

"So you will find it to your advantage to keep as quiet as possible, and wait till something turns up in your favor."

"And if there shouldn't anything turn up—what then?"

"Keep waiting!" said Jimmy, with a smile that showed his white teeth.

"And suppose I shouldn't choose to be so submissive as you desire—what then?"

"This!"

And the hand of the safe-breaker rested significantly upon a weapon at his belt.

"We'll leave you for a short time, and take the risks of your making a row," Jimmy added, with an indifference that indicated very little apprehension of betrayal through any outcries or efforts which their prisoner could make.

Without another word, the two men went out by way of a narrow door, fitted in the rocky wall of the small, cellar-like room.

"Well, I'm in a pickle this time, and no mistake," Quimby exclaimed, when he was alone. "And the question is, in what part of North America this cellar is located, and whether I've got to stay and take the chances of being discovered by a second Columbus! Ha! what now?"

For the door at that moment softly opened, and a light, graceful form entered and advanced silently toward him.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE "HEAD-LIGHT" OF THE "THREE H'S."

Two of the most active members of the famous detective firm known as the "three H's," were, at nearly the



same time, fortuitously placed at the mercy of the invincible man whom they were striving to capture.

Jules Jepworth had been followed by detectives before, and yet he had never been caught.

Other officers, who had taken no active part in the pursuit of the famous king of safe-breakers, were inclined to believe that failure to outwit and crush Jepworth was due to lack of nerve or persistence on the part of those engaged in the work.

The "three H's" were not so egotistical as this, however, and when they decided to take up this case in preference to others which promised them more money with less of risk, they were prepared to meet the shrewdest and best organized band of secret criminals in the country.

They even believed that some of the wonderful successes of Jules Jepworth and his gang were due to co-operation of persons who held places of trust.

But, cautious and far-sighted as they were, even the "three H's" did not dream that Jules Jepworth could operate so many wires in so many different localities, all at the same time.

It seemed like a piece of pure misfortune that precipitated Kirk Hyde into the pit, just as he was making such an important discovery; and it was ill-luck combined with imprudence that put the indomitable "sandwich" of the "three H's" under the weather.

But where was Rexford Hunt, the cool, calculating "head-light" of the firm?

Had Quimby really caught a glimpse of him entering the very stock-shed where he had himself met with such a treacherous reception, or had his eyes deceived him?

The hum of machinery in the great factory continued as though nothing of an extraordinary nature had transpired almost within stone's-throw of the building.

The hour was a little before five o'clock of the dark November afternoon when Quimby Hall entered the stock-shed and there met with the unexpected experience which has been detailed.

The lights continued to twinkle in the big factory, and the machinery to make its busy music until six. Then the hoarse whistle proclaimed that the day's work of the hundreds of operatives was done, and that they might go to their homes.

For a short time the mill yard was black with the working people. But soon all was silent and dark where a short time before there had been so much life and bustle.

The lights in the mill went out. But in the office, where the cashier and book-keepers bent over their desks, a light, somewhat dim, it is true, still glimmered.

Two of the clerks and the head book-keeper were still behind the railing. The clerks had donned their overcoats, and were about to go out. The head book-keeper, however, was still at work.

"Be sure and see that the extra watchman gets here by nine, for I don't care to stay here alone later than that hour," said the book-keeper, in a low tone, to one of the clerks.

"I'll see that he gets here ahead of time," was the reply.

"You know that it is rather risky business having so much money on hand here over night," the other continued, "and by a little foresight on the part of the president of the company, it might have been prevented. But it is his style to do as he pleases, and if it happens to suit his convenience to draw the money over-night and use the private safe as a money-vault, we'll have to let him do it. But one of these times he will find out that it doesn't pay to be too cranky. That's all, Mr. Cheney. Good-night."

The clerks went out, leaving the book-keeper alone, with the loud-ticking clock and flickering gas-light to keep him company.

For half an hour he worked on the books, and then, putting them away, he took a revolver from a drawer and slipping it into a pocket, began to pace the floor, to pass away the time.

Thus an hour elapsed. Then he stepped into the rear office to see if the windows there were all secure, forgetting for the moment that he had himself fastened them early in the evening.

Returning, he was startled to find a man standing by his desk, with his head bent slightly forward, and his

eyes, which were hidden by spectacles, yet keen as a hawk's, looking keenly at the book-keeper.

"Ha!" exclaimed the latter.

And in an instant he was covering the intruder with his revolver.

But the other did not move a muscle.

"Go slow, my friend, till you know whom you are shooting!" said the stranger, quietly.

"I'll give you just one minute in which to give an account of yourself, or to get out of here!" said the book-keeper.

And his nerves grew steady now that the actual call upon them had come.

"If I should mind that silly order," the stranger replied, "you would find yourself in the worst pickle you ever got into, and all because you didn't stop to consider before you acted. I have been here for nearly an hour, and I was afraid I might stir up too much of an investigation and a noise if I declared myself earlier. But I don't come after the money in the safe yonder. I come to save it. See here!"

As he spoke the intruder flung back his coat and showed a badge. It bore the names:

"Hunt, Hall & Hyde, New York,  
"Private Detectives."

"And I am Rexford Hunt, sometimes called the head-light of the firm," the intruder continued, with a reassuring smile.

The book-keeper put up his weapon and extended his hand.

"I am sure that you can be no fraud, and I am too greatly relieved in mind to hesitate!" he exclaimed, warmly.

"I hardly think I am a fraud, though I may not turn out to be half as smart as you might think from the reputation of our firm. It is the sandwich and the tail-ender who do the telling work when the three H's are all on deck. But for some reason I failed to get answers from them when I last sent them telegrams about this affair, and so I came myself. Now we have very little time for explanation. But I want you to tell me just how you are situated here, and then to comply, without question, with every suggestion I may think best to make. May I depend upon you?"

"Yes, sir," was the emphatic response.

"You have an unusual amount of money in your safe?"

"Yes, quite a large amount."

"How much, in cash?"

"Probably thirty thousand dollars."

"It was drawn from the bank to-day?"

"At about one o'clock this afternoon."

"How many persons besides yourself know of it?"

"Two clerks, and of course the officials who were in the bank when it was drawn out."

"And the president of your manufacturing company?"

"Of course, since it was by his orders that it was drawn to-night until to-morrow morning."

"He was rather particular, wasn't he?"

"I think so, but it does no good for me to say so."

"You are sure that no one outside got wind of it?"

"I can't see how it was possible, for I believe the clerks here both to be trustworthy."

"Yet it was known, even before the money was actually deposited in your safe."

"Are you sure of this, Mr. Hunt?"

"I intercepted a telegram from one of the Jepworth safe-breakers' gang to another, to the effect that the money would be in your safe without special protection. The telegram was in cipher, of course, but I made out to guess at the key, after having copied the telegram, and sent the original on to its destination. That is how I got at the plot. You see, the telegraph officials favor me in these matters. Now I will tell you what to do. We have about fifteen minutes in which it will be safe to act. Can I depend upon you?"

"Yes. I suppose you wish me to go out and summon help—"

"Not at all. I want you to open the safe, in the first place."

The book-keeper hesitated.



"I never saw you before——" he began.

"And you may never see me again—but you must do as I require if you would save the money," was the sharp retort.

"Well, if I consent to do that?"

"You will remove the cash and conceal it upon your person—all except the specie, of course, which would be too heavy. And please to lose no time."

"But, as I say, I do not know you. That badge which you wear is all right, and I have confidence in the famous detectives there named. But how do I know that you are the one whom you represent yourself to be?"

"I have shown you all the proofs I have at hand, and you must take my word for the rest. There is no reason for you to doubt me; and besides, I assure you that if you do not comply with my request the attempt to secure that money will succeed. I have no one here to help me defeat the safe breakers, and there is no time to get help. Come, open the safe!"

Still the book-keeper hesitated.

Quick as a flash, Rexford Hunt turned to the safe, turned the knob to and fro with a practiced hand, and in another moment the astounded book-keeper saw the heavy door swing open.

"Now, will you take out the money, or shall I?" the detective asked, facing the other with a smile.

"How—how did you do it?" faltered the book-keeper.

"No matter—only this is a pretty slim safe to put so much money in. You might as well tie it up in a stocking as to use a safe with the combination of which everybody is familiar!"

"Then you knew the combination?"

"I couldn't have opened the door so quickly if I hadn't known it."

"How came you by it?"

"It was given in the telegram which I intercepted from one to another of the safe-breakers' gang."

"Then there is a traitor in the office!"

"Quite likely. But that isn't to the point. Will you take care of that money, or shall I?"

"I will. But this is a state of affairs that I never dreamed of. To think that our combination is common property among the crooks of New York!"

The book-keeper removed the funds, and taking the advice of the detective, he concealed them upon his person.

But he looked pale and nervous when he had finished the process.

"What next?" he asked, in a voice which could not keep at a steady note.

"Go into the rear office and conceal yourself. Then wait and listen. Don't get nervous. I will stay here and capture the crooks!"

The "head-light" of the "three H's" spoke with a confidence which was contagious, and the book-keeper obeyed him without objection.

Scarcely had he done so, however, before he heard the rear door softly open, and the two men enter!

What was to be the outcome?

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A CLOSE SHAVE.

The reader will remember that Kirk Hyde, the "tail-ender" of the "three H's," was in a most critical situation at the bottom of the pit into which he had been precipitated.

He could almost feel the gaze of the invincible king of safe-breakers fixed upon him. At the same time he realized that his enemy was on the point of throwing down another fagot, with the deliberate purpose of testing the genuineness of his pretended insensibility.

The first fagot still hissed and flared at the bottom of the pit, and by its light the detective made a most wonderful discovery.

Right in front of him, at the very bottom of the pit, was an excavation in the earthen wall.

Its depth could not be estimated, since the light shone in only for a yard or more, and all was darkness beyond.

But he did not stop then to estimate final chances.

"I don't propose to have my back scorched by any of that bloke's torches!" was his mental resolution.

By a quick, precise movement, he thrust his short body forward, and in less time than is required for us to state the fact, he was ensconced in the small square excavation.

There was room within to turn himself, and without waiting to explore the passage farther, he turned about and took a cautious upward peep, to observe the developments above.

Just as he did so the first fagot was extinguished, and he saw the second come flaring down.

It struck precisely at the spot where he was lying but a moment before.

At the same instant he heard a cry of astonishment come simultaneously from the lips of Jules Jepworth and Tad Silsby.

"Good land!" gasped the latter.

"He isn't there!" said the harsh voice of the chief of the safe breakers.

"But he must be there—he has shifted his position, and our eyes are blinded by the light from the torch!" Jepworth added, in the next breath.

"Can't see hide nor hair of him, though," returned Tad.

"Get another fagot—get a dozen of them, and light them all! If he is there, and of course he is, we will soon make him squeal! Quick, for we have little time to lose! It will soon be broad daylight, and then I must be out of sight!"

Tad had already started to obey. And in the meanwhile Kirk Hyde could see the fierce face of the noted safe-breaker bending above the top of the pit.

"A pretty chance to wing him—only it would be too much like murder!" thought Hyde, while he fingered a weapon.

Tad Silsby's face reappeared.

"Here are yer fagots," he said.

"Light them, fast as you can. Hand a part of them here! We will soon have a bonfire at the bottom of the pit that will make him cry for quarter!"

Jepworth worked rapidly, and was soon lighting and throwing down fagot after fagot. But Tad worked with less effect.

It was clear that he did not fancy the idea of endangering a human life in that way.

It was going a little too far, even if there were a prospect of financial independence ahead in return.

"Come, what are you doing? Why aren't you throwing down some fire? Take hold, or I'll pitch you down to keep the other one company!"

"Can't do it!" muttered Tad, but not in a voice intended for the ears of the other.

Jepworth again bent over the pit to see if the blazing brands revealed the game which he was trying to smoke out.

Bang!

A pistol report from the bottom of the well. And at the same time a bullet whistled past the safe-breaker's face and twitched the brim of his hat!

"Maledictions!" he gasped, recoiling from the opening.

"Thought I could do it!" muttered Kirk Hyde, still clutching his smoking weapon and gazing up at the sky, which was now brightening with dawn.

"What in blazes was it?" exclaimed Tad Silsby, whose face grew suddenly pale.

"A pistol-shot—that's what!"

And Jules Jepworth took off his broad-brimmed hat and stared at the bullet-hole which had been made within an inch of his left ear.

"Fired at ye, did he?"

"Yes! And it looks as if he meant to finish me. This is warm work! I have met men with sand before, but this one takes the cake! See here—I don't like to take life, but I had rather do anything than be beaten. We haven't five minutes of time in which we are secure. I must get out of sight at once, or run the risk of having all the police in the city about my ears. But I have got to take some risks for the sake of winning in this little battle. You will help me, or I'll find a way to make you, for you have gone too far now to retreat, since you would be arrested as quick as I would if the cops were to get onto



us now. You have worked mighty slow, but I want to see if you can't work fast. You see the horse-shed yonder, where the laborers put up their teams?"

"Yes, I see it."

"Well, there is plenty of straw for bedding inside. Go and fetch all you can stagger under. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I'll do it!"

"And, mind," added the invincible tones of Jepworth, "I shall cover you with my revolver while you are going and returning, and if you are too slow I'll find a way to quicken your steps. Now, hustle!"

Tad Silsby was a giant, but he knew that he could not cope with a loaded revolver.

He started at a run toward the shed alluded to, his heart beating fast with a new and terrible apprehension.

He realized that he had leagued his fortunes with those of a desperate man, and one who would not flinch before any foe, nor shrink from any deed that should promise him triumph in his struggle to escape from the man-trackers who, day by day, pressed him more closely.

The "tail-ender" of the "three H's" could hear every word spoken by his invincible enemy, and he realized that the latter was about to try some desperate device for defeating his adversary.

"This is a pretty good time for me to put in my best licks, if I've got any left!" was the muttered comment of the detective.

And in a moment he had snatched one of the burning fagots from the bottom of the pit and began a more thorough examination of the excavation into which he had retreated.

To his intense relief he found that it extended in the shape of a narrow tunnel, in an upward angle.

Without hesitation he began to crawl along its length, impelled by a growing conviction that it would lead him to liberty.

Once he glanced back. He could see the interior of the pit, and it was in a red glare of flame. He could hear the crackling of the fire, and knew that Tad had returned with the straw, and that the safe-breaker was throwing the inflammable material into the well.

The latter was a mass of roaring, crackling blaze!

For a moment the detective watched it, sobered by the realization of the unique and dreadful peril from which he had escaped.

At the same time he became conscious of a strong draught of air from the as yet unexplored end of the tunnel.

"That tells the story!" he exclaimed, half aloud. "There is an opening ahead, and the heat of the fire in the pit makes a draught. Lucky for me that it blows toward the fire instead of the other way, else I might be smoked out like a woodchuck!"

Without further delay Kirk Hyde made his way along the steep, narrow passage, and soon he found that he had reached what appeared to be the end of it.

Still the air blew strong in his face, and it had the smell of a cellar.

A rock, fitted loosely in the end of the opening, was all that blocked his way, and this he quickly removed.

It was in a cellar that he now found himself; and a little later he had climbed a flight of stairs and stood in the principal room of one of the laborers' houses.

The occupants had just stepped out, in response to a cry of fire. The hut next to which the pit was dug was in flames. The fire had caught from the roaring flames that came up out of the well, and a crowd was rapidly gathering.

In the meantime, while the lurid glare lit up the scene, Jules Jepworth hurried away into the forest. And he was followed by the writhing, stealthy form of the "tail-ender" of the "three H's!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

### "HANDS UP!"

At the close of chapter sixteen we left Quimby Hall, the "sandwich" of the great detective firm, fettered and manacled, and a prisoner in what appeared to be an under-ground room.

The door had opened, and by the dim light of the lamp that illumined the place he beheld the graceful form of a young girl approach.

At first he did not recognize her. But when she bent her gaze full upon him a low exclamation broke from his lips.

"It is Lena Jepworth!" he said, half-aloud.

"Yes, but speak low!" she responded, bending over him, and fixing her beautiful eyes upon his.

Once more he was indescribably thrilled by her beauty and the music of her voice, the like of which he had never seen or heard before.

"And you are here!" he murmured, trying to rise.

"To liberate you," she answered.

"Good! I couldn't believe that you were in league with those thugs and burglars! I felt that your connection with them must be——"

"Hush!" she cautioned, with her finger upon his lips.

In another moment she had unlocked his manacles, and with a long breath of infinite relief he sprang to his feet.

"You followed me here to save me from those ruffians, and I'll gamble on it?" he said, as he took one of her small hands in his.

"I overheard their plot to seize you," she answered, "and tried to get here in time to prevent it. But I was too late. I had to await my chance to get in here. And now there is not a moment to lose if you would escape unobserved."

"I don't know as I care whether I'm observed or not, so long as I have the use of my wits and my limbs. You have done me a mighty good turn, and I think that deserves another, as the saying is. I happen to know that I owe this little experience to members of Jules Jepworth's safe-breaking gang, and they acted under orders from Jules Jepworth himself. I fancy that you know as much?"

Quimby's clear eyes sought those of the girl. And hers fell, while a faint flush stole into her cheeks.

"I came pretty near ending up my career at the hands of some of these same toughs when I paid you the visit. Did you know anything about that?"

"I could not help you then. I intended to come to you and give you warning, but I was locked into a room and could not get out in time. Believe me, sir——"

"Oh, I believe you, you may gamble on it!" Quimby hastened to interrupt. "But what I want is more truth rather than a repetition of what I feel convinced of already. I overheard you talking with a cranky chap who called himself Jules Jepworth. What was he to you? You seemed to be afraid of him?"

"He is my brother," was the low reply.

"But that is not the chief of safe-breakers?"

"Oh, no."

"And yet the real Jules Jepworth—the one who opens safety-vaults as he opens common doors—makes his headquarters at that place, or at least for a part of the time?"

She hesitated, but answered, frankly, at last:

"That is the real Jules Jepworth's home. The one you saw is insane, and he imagines himself to be Jules. His real name is Robert. He reads in the papers about the exploits of the real Jules, and that colors his vagaries."

"Very well. But that isn't telling what the real Jules is to you?"

And Quimby's eyes fairly compelled hers to meet them.

"I cannot betray him!" she answered, in a tremulous tone.

"I don't ask it. But I must know what he is to you. A great deal depends upon it. You must tell me—for your name is Jepworth, too!"

"Yes, our names are the same."

"Is he your father?"

"No."

"Your husband?"

A bright flame leaped into her cheeks.

"No, no!" she cried.

The "sandwich" of the "three H's" suddenly felt as though he had been given wings, and could fly.

"Glory!" he ejaculated.

He caught one of her hands in his, raised it to his lips, then as suddenly released it, saying:

"Then I can fall in love with you if I please, and I may



to what I can to save a beautiful flower from the taint of a life amid the slums! There!—don't blush up, nor try to run away from me, for I am done talking that nonsense for the present, and will say no more of it till the conditions are more fitting. Then Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker, is your brother?"

"He is my brother," she replied.

"And you have known all along what he is?"

"I have been sure only for a short time. And during that time I have done all in my power to deter him from pursuing the criminal course in which he seems to have been so successful. And yet he is my brother, and I would defend him against his enemies."

"That is natural. But you will find that a career like his can end in only one way, and that his will be no exception. But we will not spend more time now. I want to escape from this place. Will you lead the way?"

Without a word she started ahead. Beyond the door was another apartment to the cellar-like abode. There, upon a settee, a man was sitting with his face buried in his hands.

"Another prisoner of the safe-breakers?" Quimby asked.

"No, he is a guest!"

"A guest?"

Without waiting for her to explain this singular statement, the young detective went up to the young man and let one hand fall upon his shoulder.

The other lifted his face with a start of fear. His face was pale and eyes sunken, as with prolonged anxiety. He trembled from head to feet, as he met the gaze of the detective.

"Who—who are you?" he gasped.

"I am the sandwich of the three H's—ever hear of him? Otherwise, Quimby Hall of Hunt, Hall & Hyde, detectives. Now, what is your name?"

The stranger buried his face in his hands again, with the muttered ejaculation:

"Then I am lost!"

"Not lost, my man, but found, and we'll gamble heavy on it," smiled Quimby. And he linked his arm in that of the other.

But the latter turned upon him with sudden fierceness. For a moment he fought for his liberty; but he soon found his wrists confined by the same manacles which Lena Jepworth had just stricken from the hands of Quimby.

"Now, you will tell me your name, and come along without a whimper," said the "sandwich."

"Need you ask my name?" he exclaimed. "When it is heralded from one end of the country to the other? But I will not deny it now. It was once honorable, and I may as well own it. Yes, I am the latest defaulter—Edgar Winthrop, of the M—National Bank. I would have fled to Canada as the others do, but unlike the others, I had little money to show for my stealing, and by a mishap I lost the little I had. I fell in with Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker, who somehow knew who I was and all about me, and he sent me here, saying that I would be as safe here as his men who sometimes used this for a rendezvous. I came—and am caught—and that is the whole story."

"The ending-up of it is true, anyhow," said Quimby. And, without another word, he followed Lena out with his prisoner.

They reached the open air by a somewhat devious route, as it appeared that the retreat was a large cellar secretly built under an old mill building adjoining the stock-shed where Quimby had been attacked.

That the latter structure was used as a gate-way to the retreat was explained by the fact that there was a secret member of the gang in the employ of the mill company, and who worked in the capacity of a clerk in the office.

The hour was a little after midnight.

At the mill office Quimby was surprised to see a light still shining from the windows, and several forms moving about within.

Lena caught his arm as he would have approached.

"No, no!" she breathlessly exclaimed.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"They are there—Ham and Jimmy, of Jepworth's gang."

"The more reason why I'm needed there," said Quimby.

In a few words he directed her to stand guard over his prisoner in a sheltered spot near the office, while he found out what was going on within the latter.

His weapons had not all been taken from him, and he gave her a revolver with instructions to use it, if their prisoner attempted to escape, or if any one interfered.

Then he crept up to the rear of the office, and peered in through a window. What he saw held him riveted to the spot with an intensity of interest which nothing else could have so quickly aroused.

Ham and Jimmy, the safe-breakers, were before the safe and the door of the latter was open. They were hastily rummaging the contents which appeared to consist only of books, papers, and a small quantity of silver money.

Both appeared to be greatly surprised and puzzled, and they were so absorbed in their search that they did not see a third figure, which had approached to within two paces of them, and stood, motionless as a sphinx, with a cocked revolver, in each hand.

A weapon covered the heart of each of the safe-breakers, and it was the relentless finger of Rexford Hunt of the "three H's" that touched the trigger.

Quimby drew his remaining weapon, and breathlessly waited for his leader to act, ready to render him aid, if it should be needed.

The robbers turned, and simultaneously found themselves looking into the muzzles of the threatening weapons.

"Hands up, and down on your knees!"

## CHAPTER XX.

### CONCLUSION.

Ham and Jimmy, the two safe-breakers, were an astounded pair.

For a single instant they hesitated; then Ham dropped upon his knees, and held up his hands in token of surrender.

But the other, while apparently on the point of imitating his companion, suddenly leaped upward and by an adroit dodge flung himself betwixt the knees of the detective, causing the latter to stagger, while one of his weapons was discharged in the air.

Seeing that his companion had no intention of giving up the fight, Ham started to his feet again and attempted to pull out a pistol. At the same time Jimmy had drawn a revolver, and was cocking it, although he was crouching at the feet of the detective, in a rather poor posture for using it.

Crack—crash—crack!

Two reports and the sounds of breaking glass were mingled.

Jimmy sank upon the floor, his pistol dropping from nerveless fingers; while Ham reeled against the safe, also relinquishing his weapon, and his right arm falling at his side.

One of the shots came from the unerring weapon of Rex Hunt; the other from outside the office, where Quimby Hall, with gleaming eyes and smoking pistol waited for an instant to note the effect.

It was a quick turning of the tables; and while the "sandwich" and the "head-light" of the "three H's" discovered each other and exchanged quick, warm glances of pleased surprise, there was no time then for the exchange of words.

Although the safe-breakers were both wounded, they still made a desperate attempt to recover their weapons and renew the fight.

But they were too late. Quimby Hall did not stop for intervening glass, but dashed out the window as though it were paper, and with that precision of movement that characterized all his actions, he soon had Jimmy, the safe-breaker, in a corner, disarmed, helpless, and begging for mercy.

"We don't shoot for fun, so you needn't beg that way," said Quimby. At the same time he beckoned to his partner who had already made Ham secure.

"I'm short of iron jewelry, Rex, so if you'll loan me a pair of bracelets for a while, I'll return 'em after my friend here is through with them. We'll both of us be ever so much obliged—won't we, my hearty!"



And Quimby gave his prisoner a playful tap on the ear with the butt of his revolver.

It is needless to say that the "jewelry" was forthcoming, and that the two safe breakers were speedily confined with the merciless manacles which they so dreaded to wear.

Not until then did Rex and Quimby clasp hands, while their faces shone upon each other with commingled emotions of joy and triumph.

"On deck—two of us, anyhow!" said Rex.

"You may gamble on it," smiled Quimby, a tremor in his voice.

The book-keeper had already joined them, and his emotions were indescribable when he saw what they had done. And while they were exchanging comments, the man who was to act as special watchman in the office also arrived.

When he saw what had happened, he turned deathly pale, and seemed overcome with some unexplained feeling.

Rex Hunt tapped him on the shoulder, and compelled him to raise his eyes.

"Own up! you are the traitor?"

The watchman recoiled—would have fled—but he was restrained by an iron hand.

"Own up! you are the traitor?" reiterated the detective.

"Oh, Heaven! who betrayed me?" gasped the watchman.

These words were an admission of guilt; and under the cool, penetrating inquiries of Rexford Hunt the whole truth was soon drawn from the man's lips. He, too, was a secret member of Jules Jepworth's gang of safe-breakers.

"Three of a kind is pretty good," said Quimby.

An early morning train took the two detectives with two of their prisoners back to the city of New York. Lena Jepworth accompanied them. The other prisoners—the watchman and Edgar Winthrop, the defaulter, were held by the authorities of the town where they were captured.

\* \* \* \* \*

Only four hours after the events just described, Jules Jepworth, in the guise of Morel, which he had assumed upon his audacious visit to Rexford Hunt in the office of the latter, alighted from an L train at the Fourteenth street station, on Sixth avenue.

Scarcely had he stepped foot in the street before a small hand was laid on his arm, and his fierce eyes met the gentle one of his sister.

"To the other side of the street, quick, and take the train going up," she exclaimed. "It is your only chance," she added, as he hesitated, and in her eagerness she pushed him toward the stairs of the L station.

Never before had she warned him of danger. He did not know, even, that she would recognize him in his clever disguise, and he was almost bewildered by the suddenness of the warning.

He cast a swift glance up and then down the avenue.

He saw no sign of danger; yet he knew that her warning was not unfounded. He bounded across the street, ran up the steps, reached the platform.

R-a-tat-tat!

Like a wild beast at bay Jules Jepworth turned.

Well he knew the significance of that sound—a police signal.

As he turned he beheld a squat figure almost at his feet while a revolver was thrust up until the muzzle actually touched his breast.

"Don't stir a hair!" said the voice of Kirk Hyde.

The chief of the safe-breakers recoiled; his hand flew to a concealed weapon; but an ear-splitting report sounded on the air, and there was a blaze of light almost in his face.

With a groan, he sank upon the platform, just as three policemen came upon the scene.

"You would have been too late, and I had to use harsh medicine to make him cave," drawled the "tail-ender" of the "three H's," while he stood over the prostrate safe-breaker.

There was a great rush of people to see what had hap-

pened. But Kirk Hyde, with his grotesque face and form, and a pistol in his hand, soon cleared the way, and the wounded safe breaker was borne down to the street by the policemen, and put into a plain carriage which was in waiting.

And long before those who witnessed the exciting capture knew the identity of either the prisoner or the dwarf-detective whose promptness prevented his escape, Jules Jepworth was in a remote cell at police headquarters.

"The safe-breakers' gang broken up; Jules Jepworth, the most audacious cracksman and skillful safe-opener in the country, captured. The latest and crowning achievement of Hunt, Hall & Hyde, the detectives, known as the three H's."

Such, in substance, were the head-lines that caught the eye in the morning papers.

But the newspapers there told only the details of the capture itself. It was left for us to give the inner history of the case, showing the patience and heroism, the skill and the gentler motives that actuated these three brave, yet strangely assorted men.

And to them fell another task, of which the newspapers never had so much as an inkling.

From the great quantity of money and other valuables which they recovered from the safe-breakers' gang, they had the option of choice in the amount of their reward.

Each took his share; the total amount was put into a lump, and in the private office of Hunt, Hall & Hyde a unanimous vote of the three was taken upon a question which Quimby Hall suggested, and which was seconded by Rexford Hunt.

The decision thus reached was as follows:

"Whereas, We find a young and beautiful girl, through no choice or fault of her own, made homeless and an outcast through our success in bringing Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker, to justice, be it hereby

"Resolved, That the sum of thirty thousand dollars which we received in cash as a reward for the mentioned capture be placed as a trust fund for the support and care of Lena Jepworth, the sister of the noted safe-breaker, until such time as she shall marry a respectable and honorable man, when the full amount shall be given her as a dowry.

"HUNT, HALL & HYDE."

\* \* \* \* \*

Olive Winthrop, by order of Kirk Hyde, was closely watched until after her husband, who was the weaker and less guilty mortal of the two, had been examined and pressed to make a confession.

Then Hyde paid her a visit, and without publicity she gave up the funds belonging to the bank, and told how she had been assisted by that strange compact with Jules Jepworth, the safe-breaker.

Winthrop was released, and the twain removed to a distant city where they live in an humbler, and therefore happier, way.

Jules Jepworth was not seriously wounded, and he is now serving time in Sing Sing Prison. If we were to hear that he had made an audacious and successful attempt at escape we would not be surprised, for strong, indeed, are the locks that can restrain such as he from liberty.

The other members of the gang are likewise "in disgrace vile." The gang is no more.

Lena Jepworth has a pretty home in the country, and as Rexford Hunt, the eldest of the "three H's" pays her frequent visits, it is possible that he may succeed in getting nominal possession of that dowry.

The "three H's" are still "on deck." For such skill as theirs there will always be a ready call, and for such kindness and magnanimity ample reward of a sort better than money.

As for Tad Silsby, he has not been seen by Kirk Hyde since his treachery.

[THE END]

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